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JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

The Nature of the Novel

1. Literary Genres

THE OLD POETICS understood by literary genres certain rules of craftsmanship which the poet had to follow, empty patterns, formal structures, within which the muse, like a docile bee, deposited its honey. I am not speaking of literary genres in this sense. The form and content are inseparable and the poetic content flows on freely without the constriction of abstract rules.

Nevertheless, one must distinguish between content and form: they are not the same thing. Flaubert used to say that the form comes out of the content as heat does from fire. The metaphor is accurate, but it would be still more accurate to say that the form is the organ and the content the function which creates it. Literary genres are then the poetic functions, the directions in which aesthetic creation moves.

The modern tendency to deny the difference between the content or theme and the form or expressive apparatus of the former seems to me as trivial as its Scholastic differentiation. Really, the difference is the same as that which exists between a direction and a road. To take a direction is not the same thing as to have gone all the way to our destination. The stone which is thrown carries within it already the curve of its flight. This curve is, so to speak, the explanation, development and fulfilment of the original impulse. Thus Tragedy is the expansion of a certain fundamental poetic theme and of nothing else; it is the expansion of the tragic. The form therefore contains the same thing that was in the content, but the former presents in an open, articulate, developed way what in the latter was a tendency or mere intention. Hence the inseparability of content and form as the two different facets of one and the same thing.

Contrary to the old Poetics I understand, then, by literary genres, certain basic themes, mutually exclusive, true aesthetic categories. The Epic, for example, is not the name of a poetic form but of a basic poetic content which reaches fulfilment in the process of its expansion or manifestation. Lyric poetry is not a

conventional idiom into which may be translated what has already been said in a dramatic or novelistic idiom, but at one and the same time a certain thing to be said and the only way to say it fully.

In one way or another man is always art's essential theme and the genres understood as mutually exclusive aesthetic themes, equally essential and final, are wide vistas opening onto the main facets of human nature. Each epoch brings with it a basic interpretation of man. Or rather, the epoch does not bring it but constitutes in itself a basic interpretation of man. For this reason, each epoch prefers a definite genre.

2. *Exemplary Novels*

During the second half of the 19th century the people of Europe enjoyed reading novels. There is no doubt that when the passage of time has sifted carefully the innumerable facts which made up that epoch, the triumph of the novel will remain as an outstanding and representative phenomenon.

Nevertheless, is it clear what the word *novel* means? Cervantes called certain of his less important productions *exemplary novels*. Does not the understanding of this title offer difficulties?

The use of *exemplary* is not so strange: that tinge of morality which even the most profane of Spanish authors gives to his stories, belongs to the heroic hypocrisy practised by the best men of the 17th century. This century, when the great spiritual sowing of the Renaissance yields its golden harvest, does not find any difficulty in accepting the Counter-Reformation and turns to the Jesuit colleges. It is the century when Galileo, after inaugurating the new physics, does not object to contradicting himself when the Church of Rome sets its harsh dogmatic hand upon him. It is the century when Descartes, having scarcely discovered the beginning of his method, which is going to turn theology into *ancilla philosophiae*, rushes to Loretto to thank Our Lady for his fortunate discovery. But this century of Catholic triumphs is not so unpropitious a time as to prevent the great rational systems from making their first appearance as formidable fortresses against faith. Let this be borne in mind by those who, with enviable simplicity, lay all the blame on the Inquisition for the poverty of thought in Spain.

But let us get back to the title of "novels" which Cervantes gives to his collection. I find here two very different types of

composition, which is not saying that something of the spirit of each cannot be found in the other. The important thing is that a radically different artistic intention prevails in each series, that poetic creation moves towards different points in them. How is it possible to include in one and the same genre, on the one hand *The Liberal Lover*, *The Spanish-English Lady*, *The Force of Blood*, *The Two Damsels* and on the other *Rinconete* and *The Jealous Extremaduran*? Let us indicate the difference in a few words: in the first series we are told about cases of love and fortune. They are about children, who, torn from the family tree, are subjected to unexpected adventures; about young men who, swept along by an erotic whirlwind, flash dizzily across the horizon like shooting stars; about worn-out, wandering young women who sigh deeply in the rooms of inns and speak of their maltreated virginity in Ciceronian style. Sometimes, in one such inn, three or four of these red-hot threads, spun by chance and passion, entangle various pairs of hearts together. To the great amazement of the people at the inn, the most extraordinary recognitions and coincidences then follow. All that is related to us in these novels is improbable, and the interest which it awakens in us springs from its very unlikeliness. The *Persiles*, which is like a long exemplary novel of this kind, reassures us that Cervantes deliberately sought such improbability. The fact that he should close his cycle of creation with this book cautions us not to simplify things too much.

The fact is that the stories told by Cervantes in some of his novels are the same venerable stories invented by the Aryan imagination many, many centuries ago. So many centuries ago, that we can find them already suggested in the original myths of Greece and the Near East. Should one apply the name *novel* to the literary genre which takes in this first series of Cervantes' novels? There is no objection, but one should specify that this literary genre consists in the narration of improbable, fanciful, unreal events.

Something very different seems to be attempted in the other series, of which *Rinconete* and *Cortadillo* can be taken as representative. Here scarcely anything happens; our minds are not excited by dynamic outbursts of passion nor do they hurry from one paragraph to the next in order to discover the turn of events. If one takes a step forward it is to rest again and glance around. Now one seeks a series of static and detailed views. The characters and their actions are so far from being unusual and unbelievable as to be actually

uninteresting. No one can say that the young rogues Rincón and Cortado, or the "shady dames" Gananciosa and Cariharta, or the ruffian Repolido, etc., possess any attraction in themselves. As we go on reading, in fact, we realize that it is not they themselves but the presentation of them given us by the author which succeeds in gaining our interest. Moreover, if they were not indifferent to us because they are well known and common, the work would lead our aesthetic emotion along very different paths. The insignificance, the indifference, the verisimilitude of these creatures are essential here.

The contrast with the artistic intention of the previous series cannot be greater. There it was the characters themselves and their goings-on which were the cause of the aesthetic enjoyment. The writer could reduce his own intervention to the minimum. Here, on the contrary, we are only interested in the way in which the author reflects in his eye the vulgar countenances of which he speaks. Cervantes realized this difference clearly when he wrote in the *Colloquy of the Dogs*:

There is one thing of which I should like to advise you, and you will see the truth of it when I come to narrate the events of my own life: some stories are charming in themselves, while in the case of others everything depends on the way in which they are told. By this I mean to say that there are some that give us pleasure when told without preamble or verbal ornaments of any sort; and there are others that have to be dressed out in words and set off with facial expressions, gestures, and inflections of the voice, in which manner something is made out of trifles and pale and flabby narratives take on point and give pleasure.¹

What is a novel then?

3. *The Epic*

One thing at any rate is very clear: what the reader of the past century was looking for under the title of novel has nothing to do with what ancient times sought in the epic. To derive the former from the latter is to close the way to our understanding of the changes in the novelistic genre, if by such changes we understand chiefly the literary evolution which came to maturity in the novel of the 19th century.

¹[Cervantes, Miguel de, *Three Exemplary Novels*, translated by Samuel Putman, New York, Viking Press, 1950. p. 132.]

The novel and the epic are exactly opposite things. The theme of the epic is the past as such: it speaks to us about a world which was and which is no longer, of a mythical age whose antiquity is not a past in the same sense as any remote historical time. It is true that local piety was gradually linking Homeric men and gods to the citizens of the present by means of slender threads, but this net of genealogical traditions does not succeed in bridging the absolute gap which exists between the mythical *yesterday* and the real *today*. No matter how many real yesterdays we put in, the sphere inhabited by the Achilles' and the Agamemnons has no relationship with our existence and we cannot reach it, step by step, by retracing the path opened up by the march of time. The epic past is not our past. Our past is thinkable as having been the present once, but the epic past eludes identification with any possible present, and when we wish to reach it through the memory it flees away from us galloping like Diomedes' horses, eternally at the same distance ahead. No, it is not the past of memories but an ideal past.

If the poet asks Mneme, Memory, to tell him about the Achaean sufferings, he does not have recourse to the subjective memory but to a cosmic memory which he supposes to be latent in the universe. *Mneme* is not the reminiscence of the individual but an elemental power.

This essential remoteness of the legendary protects epic objects from corruption. The same reason that prevents us from bringing them too close to us and from giving them too much youth—the youth of present-day things—preserves their bodies from the effects of old age. The eternal freshness and everlasting mild fragrance of the Homeric songs indicate the inability to become old rather than a tenacious youthfulness, because old age would not be old if the aging process were to stop. Things become old because each hour as it passes takes them farther from us *ad infinitum*. The old grows older all the time. Achilles, on the other hand, is just as far from us as from Plato.

4. Poetry of the Past

It is time to abandon the opinions held on Homer by the philology of a hundred years ago. Homer is not ingenuousness nor is he a temperament of the dawn of history. Today everyone knows

that the *Iliad*, at least our *Iliad*, has never been understood by ordinary people. That is to say, it was an archaic work from the beginning. The bard was composing in a conventional language which sounded even to him like something old, sacramental and crude. The customs which he assigned to the characters were also of primeval harshness.

Who would believe it? Homer, an archaic author; the infancy of Poetry just an archaeological fiction! Who would believe it? It is not merely a question of there being archaism in the epic but that the epic *is* an archaism and nothing else essentially. The theme of the epic is the ideal past, the absolute antiquity, we have said. Now we add that archaism is the literary form of the epic, the instrument of poetry-making.

This seems to me to be of the utmost importance if we are to see clearly the meaning of the novel. After Homer, Greece required many centuries to accept the present as a poetic possibility. Actually she never accepted it wholeheartedly. Only what was ancient was poetic for Greece, or rather what was primary in order of time. It is not what the Romanticists called ancient, which resembles too closely the antiques of second-hand dealers, with their morbid appeal and our perverse delight in their ruinous, worm-eaten, fermented and decrepit qualities. All these dying things have only a reflected beauty and it is not they but the waves of emotion they arouse in us that are the source of poetry. But for the Greek, beauty was an intimate attribute of essential things. What was accidental and momentary seemed to him to be devoid of it. They had a rationalistic sense of aesthetics² which prevented them from separating poetic from metaphysical values. They considered beautiful that which contained in itself the origin and the norm, the cause and the model of phenomena. This closed universe of the epic myth is made up exclusively of essential and exemplary objects which were reality when this world of ours had not yet begun to exist.

Between the epic world and the one which surrounds us there was no communication, either great or small. All this life of ours with its today and its yesterday belongs to a second stage of cosmic life. We form part of a second-rate and decayed reality: the men who surround us are not men in the same sense as Ulysses and

²The concept of proportion, of measure, which always came to Greek lips when speaking of art, shows clearly its mathematical backbone.

Ulysses and Hector are men or gods. The gods were then more on the level of men because the latter were divine. Where does the god end and the man begin for Homer? The problem reveals the decadence of our world. The epic figures correspond to an extinct fauna, the character of which is precisely the lack of difference between the god and the man or at least the contiguity of both species. The transition from the former to the latter requires no more steps than the slip of a goddess or the lust of a god.

In short, for the Greeks only the earliest things are fully poetic not for being old but for being the oldest, for containing in themselves the beginnings and the causes.³ The stock of myths which made up at the same time the traditional religion, physics and history contains all the poetic material of Greek art at its best. The poet has to start from it, and move within it, although it may be to alter it, as the tragic poets do. These men cannot conceive that a poetic object could be invented just as we could not conceive inventing a mechanical law. This marks the limitation of Greek epic and of Greek art in general since until its time of decadence the latter never succeeds in breaking away from its mythical uterus.

Homer believes that the events happened as his hexameters tell us: his audience believed it too. Moreover, Homer does not claim to tell anything new. What he tells, his audience already knows, and Homer knows that they know it. His work is not really creative and he avoids surprising his listener. It is simply a question of an artistic rather than a poetic labor, of technical virtuosity. I do not find in the history of Art any attitude more akin to that of the Greek bard than the one that shines on the door of the Florentine Baptistry carved by Ghiberti. The latter is not very interested in the objects represented, but he is driven by a mad pleasure to represent, to transcribe into bronze, figures of men, animals, trees, rocks, fruit.

So it is with Homer. The gentle flow of the epic stream, the rhythmical calm with which equal attention is paid to the great and to the small, would be absurd if we imagine the poet pre-occupied with the invention of his plot. The poetic theme existed beforehand once and for all. It is only a question of making it

fully felt. For that reason it is not absurd to devote four lines to the death of a hero and not less than two to the closing of a door. Telemachus' nurse

*left the apartment; pulling on the silver ring
she closed the door after her, and made fast the bolt in the slot.*

5. *The Bard*

The aesthetic topics of our time may cause us to interpret wrongly the satisfaction which the sweet blind singer of Ionia felt in making visible the beautiful things of the past. It may actually occur to us to call it realism. Terrible, uncomfortable word! What would a Greek do with it if we were to slip it into his soul? For us the real is the perceptible, what our eyes and ears pour into us. We have been brought up by a spiteful age which has beaten the universe into a sheet and made of it a surface, a mere appearance. When we search for reality we search for appearances. But the Greek took reality to be the opposite: the real is the essential, the profound and latent; not the external appearance but the living sources of all appearance. Plotinus could never make up his mind to have his portrait made because this was, according to him, to bequeath to the world the shadow of a shadow.

The epic poet, with the baton in his hand, rises in our midst; his blind face turns vaguely towards where the light is brightest; the sun is for him a father's hand which, in the night, touches a son's cheeks; his body has learned the motion of the heliotrope and tries to receive the broad caress as it passes. His lips quiver a little like the strings of an instrument being tuned up. What is his desire? He would like to put the things that happened clearly before us. He begins to speak. But no, this is not speaking, it is reciting. The words come in a disciplined way and they seem to be disassociated from the trivial existence which they had in ordinary speech. Like an ascending apparatus, the hexameter holds the words suspended in an imaginative air and keeps their feet off the ground. This is symbolic. This is what the bard wants: to remove us from everyday reality. The phrases are ritualistic, the expressions solemn and slightly hieratic, the syntax archaic. From the present it picks only the flower: from time to time a comparison drawn from the unchangeable, basic phenomena of the cosmos—the sea, the wind, the wild beasts, the birds—injects into the ancient trunk

the sap of actuality strictly necessary for the past, as such, to take possession of us and dislodge the present.

Such is the practice of the bard, such is his role in the construction of an epic work. Unlike the modern poet he is not afflicted by the itch of originality. He knows that his song is not his alone. The ethnic conscience, creator of the myth, had accomplished the main task before he was born; it had created the beautiful objects. His role is reduced to the conscientiousness of an artisan.

6. *Helen and Madame Bovary*

I do not understand how a Spaniard, a teacher of Greek, could have said that it facilitates the comprehension of the *Iliad* to imagine a struggle between the youths from two Castilian towns for the possession of a handsome village girl. I could understand being told about Madame Bovary that we should turn our attention towards the type of a provincial girl practising adultery. This would be fitting: the novelist completes his task when he has succeeded in representing in concrete form for us what we already knew in the abstract.⁴ As we close the book we say: "Adulterous women in the provinces are actually like this; and these rural assemblies are really rural assemblies." We have satisfied the novelist with that reaction. But reading the *Iliad* it does not occur to us to congratulate Homer because his Achilles is certainly a good Achilles, a perfect Achilles, and his Helen an unmistakable Helen. The epic figures are not representatives of types but unique creatures. Only one Achilles has existed and only one Helen; only one war on the bank of the Scamander. If we were to think of the careless wife of Menelaus as just an ordinary woman, courted by an enemy of her country, Homer would have failed. Because his mission was very restricted—not free like that of Ghiberti or Flaubert—he has to make us see this Helen and this Achilles, who, luckily, do not resemble the humans we usually meet at the cross-roads.

The epic is at first the creation of unique beings, of heroic natures: the age-old popular fantasy performs this first operation. Later on the epic consists of the realization, the full evocation of those beings, and this is the task of the bard.

By means of this long circuit we have gained, I believe, some

⁴"Ma pauvre Bovary sans doute souffre et pleure dans vingt villages de France à la fois, à cette heure même." Flaubert: *Correspondance*, II, 284.

clarity from which the meaning of the novel becomes apparent to us. We find in the novel the opposite of the epic genre. If the theme of the latter is the past, as such, that of the novel is the present as such. If the epic figures are invented, if they are unique and incomparable natures, which in themselves have a poetic value, the characters of the novel are typical and non-poetic; they are taken, not from the myth, which is already an aesthetic and creative element or atmosphere, but from the street, from the physical world, from the living environment of the author and the reader. We have cleared up a third point: literary art is not all the poetry there is, but only a secondary poetic activity. Art is the technique, it is the mechanism of realization. This mechanism may be and must be realistic on occasions, but not necessarily and not in all cases. The desire for realism, characteristic of our times, cannot be raised to the rank of a standard. We like the illusion of resemblance, but other ages have had other preferences. To presume that the human race has wanted and will always want the same thing as we do, would be vanity. No, let us open our hearts wide so that they may catch in them all the human things which are alien to us. Let us prefer to have a rebellious diversity on earth rather than monotonous coincidences.

7. The Myth, Leaven of History

The epic perspective which consists, as we have seen, in looking at the events of the world from certain cardinal myths, as from the highest peaks, does not die with Greece. It has come down to us. It will never die. When people no longer believe in the cosmogonic and historical reality of their narratives, the good times of the Hellenic race have certainly passed. But once the epic themes, the mythical seeds, are deprived of all religious significance, they not only endure as splendid irreplaceable phantoms, but they gain in liveliness and plastic force. Hoarded in literary memory, hidden in the subsoil of popular reminiscence, they constitute a poetic leaven of incalculable energy. Bring the true history of a king, of Antiochus, or of Alexander, for example, close to this incandescent material. The real history will begin to burn on four sides: the normal and customary which there is in it will perish, utterly reduced to ashes. After the fire there will remain before our astonished eyes, shining like a diamond, the marvellous history of a magical

Apollonius,⁵ of a miraculous Alexander. This marvellous history, of course, is not history: it is called a novel. In this way it has been possible to speak of the Greek novel.

Now the ambiguity which exists in this word becomes evident. The Greek novel is only corrupted history, divinely corrupted by the myth, or rather, like the voyage to the country of the Arimaspi, fantastic geography, memories of voyages which the myth has disjointed and later put together again as it pleases. To the same genre belongs all literature of the imagination, all that is called story, ballad, legend and books of chivalry. They always deal with a certain piece of historical material which the myth has disjointed and reabsorbed.

We should not forget that the myth is the representative of a world different from ours. If ours is the real one, the mythical world will appear unreal to us. At any rate, what is possible in one is impossible in the other; the mechanics of our planetary system do not rule in the mythical system. The reabsorption of a terrestrial event by a myth consists then in turning it into a physical and historical impossibility. It retains the earthly material, but it is subject to a law so different from that in force in our world that for us it means the same as a lack of all law.

The beneficent influence of the epic, mother of this literature of the imagination, will extend over humanity to the end of time. It will duplicate the universe, it will bring us frequently news of a delightful orb, in which, if the gods of Homer no longer dwell, their legitimate successors rule. The gods stand for a dynasty under which the impossible is possible. Where they reign, the normal does not exist; all-embracing disorder emanates from their thrones. The constitution they have sworn to obey has one single article: all kinds of adventure are permitted.

8. Books of Chivalry

When the vision of the world which the myth supplies is deprived of its command over human souls by its hostile sister, science, the epic loses its religious mien and takes a short cut in search of adventures. Chivalry means adventures: the books of chivalry were the last great sprouting from the old epic trunk—the last until now, not simply the last.

⁵The figure of Apollonius is based on material from the story of Antiochus.

The book of chivalry retains the epic characteristics, except the belief in the reality of what is told.⁶ Also the events related in it are considered as old, with an ideal antiquity. The old days of King Arthur, like the time of Maricastana, are curtains of a conventional past which hang vaguely, indistinctly over the chronology. Apart from the repartee of some dialogues, the poetic instrument in the book of chivalry is, as in the epic, the narrative. I have to disagree with the accepted opinion which makes the narrative the instrument of the novel. This opinion is explained by a failure to contrast the two genres confused under one name. The book of imagination narrates, but the novel describes. The narrative is the form in which the past exists for us, and it is possible to narrate only what has happened, that is to say, what no longer exists. One describes, on the other hand, the present. The epic, as is known, makes use of a preterite tense which, like the past that it narrates, is ideal, and which has received in grammars the name of epic or gnomic aorist.

On the other hand, in the novel the description interests us precisely because we are not actually interested in what is described. We disregard the objects which are placed before us in order to pay attention to the manner in which they are presented to us. Neither Sancho, nor the priest, nor the barber, nor the Knight of the Green Overcoat, nor Madame Bovary, nor her husband, nor the fool Homais are interesting. We would not give twopence to see them. On the contrary, we would give away a kingdom for the satisfaction of seeing them captured within the confines of the two famous books. I do not understand how this has passed unnoticed by those who think along aesthetic lines. What we pitilessly tend to call boredom is a whole literary genre, although one that has failed. The boredom consists in the narration of something which does not interest us.⁷ The narrative must be justified by its subject matter, and it will be proportionately better the more inconspicuous it is, the less it interferes between the happenings and ourselves.

The author of the book of chivalry, then, in contrast to the novelist, directs all his poetic energy towards the invention of

⁶I would even say that, in a certain way, it is retained. But I would be forced to write many pages, unnecessary here, about that mysterious kind of hallucination which lies, undoubtedly, in the pleasure felt when we read a book of chivalry.

⁷In a number of *La Critica* Croce mentions the definition which an Italian gives of the bore: i.e., one who takes away our solitude and does not give us companionship.

interesting events. These are the adventures. Today we could read the *Odyssey* as a tale of adventure; the work would doubtless lose nobility and significance, but we would not have misjudged entirely its aesthetic intention. Below Ulysses, the equal of the gods, peeps Sindbad the Sailor, and although very distantly, it hints at the good old bourgeois muse of Jules Verne. The connection is based on the intervention of the whim directing the events. In the *Odyssey* the whim acts hallowed by the differing humors of the gods; it shows its nature cynically in the fabulous stories of the books of chivalry. If in the old poem the wanderings gain heightened interest because they come from the whim of a god—a theological reason after all—the adventure is interesting on its own account because of its inherent whimsicality.

If we examine more closely our ordinary notion of reality, perhaps we shall find that we do not consider real what actually happens, but a certain manner of happening that is familiar to us. In this vague sense, then, the real is not so much what is seen as foreseen; not so much what we see as what we know. If a series of events takes an unforeseen turn, we say that it seems incredible. For that reason our ancestors called the adventure story a fiction.

The adventure breaks the oppressive, insistent reality like a piece of glass. It is the unforeseen, the unthought of, the new. Each adventure is a new birth of the world, a unique process. How can it fail to be interesting?

Soon after we begin living we become aware of the confines of our prison. It takes us thirty years at the most to recognize the limits within which our possibilities will move. We take stock of reality, which is like measuring the length of the chain which binds our feet. Then we say: "Is this life? Nothing more than this? A closed cycle which is repeated, always identical?" Here is a dangerous hour for every man.

In this connection I recall an admirable drawing of Gavarni. It is of a sly old man near a stage where the world is shown through a peep-hole. The old man is saying: "Il faut montrer à l'homme des images, la réalité l'embête!" Gavarni was living among some Parisian writers and artists who were defenders of aesthetic realism. The ease with which the public was attracted by the adventure stories irritated him, and in fact, weak races may turn into a vice this strong drug of imagination, which allows us to escape from the heavy weight of existence.

9. The Puppet Show of Master Pedro

As the thread of the adventure develops we experience an increasing emotional tension, as if by accompanying the former in its course we felt ourselves violently pulled away from the line followed by inert reality. At each step this reality pulls, threatening to make the event conform with the natural course of events, and it is necessary for a new impulse from the adventurous power to free it and push it towards greater impossibilities. We go carried along in the adventure as if within a projectile, and in the dynamic struggle between it, as it advances on an already escaping tangent, and the center of the earth which tries to restrain it, we side with the projectile. This partiality of ours increases with each incident and adds to a kind of hallucination, in which we take the adventure for an instant as actual reality.

Cervantes has represented in a marvellous way this psychological reaction of the reader of fables, in the process followed by the spirit of Don Quixote in front of Master Pedro's puppet show.

The horse of Don Gaiferos in its headlong gallop leaves a vacuum in its wake, and the current of fascinated air, which drags along everything loose, rushes into it. There the soul of Don Quixote, light as down, goes whirling, snatched up in the illusory vortex like a dry leaf; just as it will be followed by all that is left of ingenuousness and sorrow in the world.

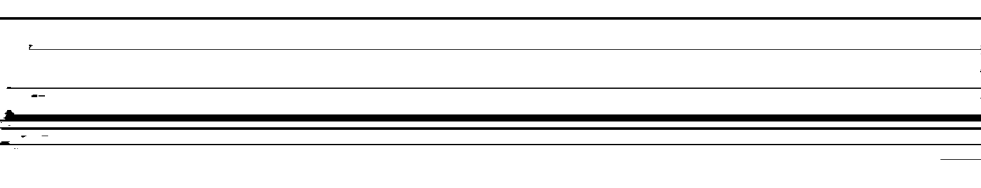
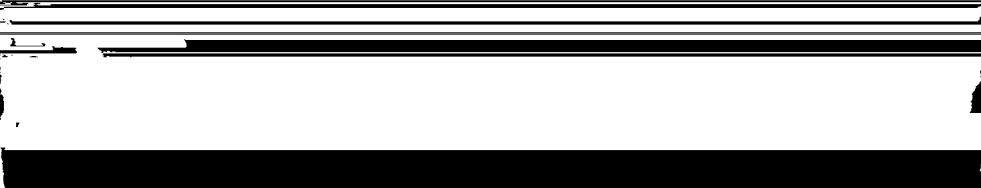
The frame of the puppet show which Master Pedro goes around presenting is the dividing line between two continents of the mind. Within, the puppet show encloses a fantastic world, articulated by the genius of the impossible. It is the field of the adventure, of the imagination, of the myth. Without there is a room in which several unsophisticated men are gathered, men like those we see every day busy in the daily struggle to live. In their midst is a fool, a knight from the neighborhood, who, one morning, abandoned his town impelled by a small anatomical anomaly of the brain. Nothing prevents us from entering this room: we could breathe in its atmosphere and touch those present on the shoulder since they are made of the same stuff and condition as ourselves. However, this room is, in its turn, included in a book, that is to say, in another puppet show larger than the first. If we should enter the room, we would have stepped inside an ideal object, we would be moving in the hollow of an aesthetic body. (Velázquez in *Las Meninas* offers us an

analogous case: at the same time as he was painting a picture of the king and queen he placed his studio in the picture. In *Las Hilanderas* he has united forever the legendary action represented by a tapestry to the humble room in which it was manufactured.)

By the way of simplemindedness and dementia, emanations come and go from one continent to the other, from the puppet show to the room, from the room to the puppet show. One would say that the important thing is precisely the osmosis and endosmosis between the two.

10. Poetry and Reality

Cervantes affirms that he is writing his book against the books of chivalry. In the criticism of recent years attention has been drawn away from this purpose of Cervantes. Perhaps it has been thought that it was a manner of speaking, a conventional presentation of the work, as was the exemplary tinge with which he covers his short novels. Nevertheless, one must return to this point



Cervantes as a polemic against books of chivalry.

If not, how can one understand the incalculable enlargement which literary art undergoes here? The epic plane down which imaginary objects glide was until now the only one, and poetry could be defined in the same terms as the epic.⁸ But now the

poetic. In contrast with the puppet show they stand formally for the attack on the poetic. Cervantes sets Sancho against every adventure in order to make it impossible when it happens to Sancho. This is his mission. We do not see, then, how the field of poetry can be spread over the real. While the imaginary was poetic in itself, reality is in itself, anti-poetic. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*: here is where aesthetics must sharpen its vision. Contrary to what the ingenuousness of our learned foragers supposes, the realistic tendency is the one which needs more justification and explanation; it is the *exemplum crucis* of aesthetics.

In fact, it would be unintelligible if the great gestures of Don Quixote did not succeed in guiding us. On which side of the show shall we place Don Quixote? It would be wrong to decide for one or another continent. Don Quixote is the intersection where both worlds meet forming a bevelled edge.

If we are told that Don Quixote belongs entirely to reality we shall not object. We would only remark that with Don Quixote his untamed will would become part of reality. This will is full of one decision: the will for adventure. Don Quixote, who is real, actually wants adventures. As he himself says: "The sorcerers may take away my luck, but not my courage and spirit." For this reason he passed from the audience to the puppet show with such astonishing ease. His is a frontier nature, as the nature of man generally is, according to Plato.

Perhaps we did not suspect a moment ago what is happening now: that reality is coming into poetry to raise adventure to a higher aesthetic power. If this should be confirmed we would see reality opening up to make room for the imaginary continent and serve it as a support, in the same way as the inn becomes on a moonlit night a ship which sails over the parched Manchegan plains carrying within it Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers, Marsiles of Sansueña and the peerless Mélisande. The fact is that what is related in the books of chivalry has reality in the imagination of Don Quixote, who, in his turn, enjoys an unquestionable existence. So that, although the realistic novel was born in opposition to the so-called novel of fantasy, it carries adventure enclosed within its body.

11. Reality, Leaven of the Myth

The new poetry which Cervantes practises cannot have as simple

a structure as the Greek and the medieval. Cervantes looks at the world from the height of the Renaissance. The Renaissance has tightened things a little more: it is an integral overcoming of the old sensibility. Galileo gives rigid rules to the universe with his physics. A new system has begun; everything goes more strictly within a mold. In the new order of things adventures are impossible. Leibnitz will soon declare that simple possibility completely lacks validity, that only the "compossible" is possible, that is to say, what is closely connected with the natural laws.⁹ In this way the possible, which, in the myth, in the miracle, affirms a crusty independence, remains stuck in the real as the adventure in Cervantes' realism.

Another characteristic of the Renaissance is the leading position acquired by the psychological. The ancient world seems a mere body without any inner recesses and secrets. The Renaissance discovers in the internal world, the *me ipsum*, the consciousness, the subjective in all their vastness.

Don Quixote is the power of this great new turn which culture takes. In it the epic comes to an end forever along with its aspiration to support a mythical orb bordering on that of material phenomena but different from it. It is true that the reality of the adventure is saved, but such a salvation involves the sharpest irony. The reality of the adventure is reduced to the psychological, to a bodily humor perhaps. It is real as far as it is vapor from a brain, so that its reality is rather that of its opposite, the material.

In summer the sun pours down torrents of fire on La Mancha, and frequently the burning earth produces the phenomenon of the mirage. The water which we see is not real water, but there is something real in it: its source. This bitter source, which produces the water of the mirage, is the desperate dryness of the land.

We can experience a similar phenomenon in two directions: one simple and straight, seeing the water which the sun paints as actual; another ironic, oblique, seeing it as a mirage, that is to say, seeing through the coolness of the water the dryness of the earth in disguise. The novel of adventures, the tale, the epic are that ingenuous manner of experiencing imaginary and significant things. The realistic novel is this second oblique manner. It re-

⁹For Aristotle and the Middle Ages anything that does not contain contradiction in itself is possible. What is "compossible" needs more. For Aristotle the centaur is possible: for us it is not because biology does not tolerate it.

quires something of the first: it needs something of the mirage to make us see it as such. So that it is not only *Don Quixote* which was written against the books of chivalry, and as a result bears the latter within it, but the novel as a literary genre consists essentially of that absorption.

This offers an explanation of what may seem inexplicable: how reality, the actual, can be changed into poetic substance. By itself, seen in a direct way, it would never be poetic: this is the privilege of the mythical. But we can consider it obliquely as destruction of the myth, as criticism of the myth. In this form reality, which is of an inert and insignificant nature, quiet and mute, acquires movement, is changed into an active power of aggression against the crystalline orb of the ideal. The enchantment of the latter broken, it falls into fine, iridescent dust which gradually loses its colours until it becomes an earthy brown. We are present at this scene in every novel. So that strictly speaking, it is not reality that becomes poetic or enters into the work of art, but only that gesture or movement of reality in which the ideal is reabsorbed.

To sum up, it is a question of a process exactly the opposite of the one engendered by the novel of the fancy. There is also the difference that the realistic novel describes the process itself, and the former only the object produced, the adventure.

12. *The Windmills*

The plain of Montiel is now for us a glaring, limitless area where all things in the world may be found illustrated. Traversing along it with Don Quixote and Sancho, we come to understand that things have two sides. One is the "sense" of things, the meaning of what they are when interpreted. The other is the "materiality" of things, their positive substance that constitutes them before and above any interpretation.

The flour mills of Criptana rise and gesticulate above the horizon in the blood-shot sunsets. These mills have a meaning: their "sense" as giants. It is true that Don Quixote is not rational. But the problem is not solved by declaring Don Quixote insane. What in him is abnormal, has been and will continue to be normal in humanity. It is true that these giants may not be giants, but what about the others? I mean, what about giants in general? From where has

man got his giants? Because they never existed nor do they exist in reality. Whenever it may have been, the occasion when man first thought up giants does not differ essentially from this scene of Cervantes. It would always be a question of something which was not gigantic but which tended to be gigantic if regarded from an ideal angle. There is an allusion to Briarean arms in the turning wings of these windmills. If we obey the impulse of that allusion and allow ourselves to go along the curve indicated by it, we shall reach the giant.

Justice and truth, too, all work of the spirit, are mirages produced on matter. Culture—the ideal side of things—tries to set itself up as a separate and self-sufficient world to which we can transfer our hearts. This is an illusion, and only looked upon as an illusion, only considered as a mirage on earth, does culture take its proper place.

13. Realistic Poetry

In the same way as the outlines of rocks and clouds contain allusions to certain animal forms, all things make from their inert materiality signs, as it were, which we interpret. These interpretations coalesce into an objectivity which is like a duplication of the primary, or so-called real objectivity. An everlasting conflict originates from this: the “idea” or “sense” of each thing and its “materiality” trying to fit into each other. But this implies the victory of one of them. If the “idea” triumphs, the “materiality” is superseded and we live in a trance. If the materiality wins out and, penetrating the vapors of the idea, reabsorbs it, we live disillusioned.

It is known that the action of seeing consists in applying a previous image which we have to a present sensation. A dark point in the distance may be seen by us successively as a tower, as a tree, as a man. One comes to agree with Plato, who explains perception as the result of something which goes from the pupil to the object and something which comes from the object to the pupil. Leonardo da Vinci used to place his students in front of a wall so that they might get accustomed to noticing a great number of imaginary forms in the shapes of the stones, in their joining lines, in the play of light and shade. Platonic to the core, all that Leonardo was looking for in reality was the Paraclete, the awakener of the spirit.

Now there are distances, lights and inclinations from which the sensitive material of things reduces the sphere of our interpretation to a minimum. The force of the concrete in things stops the movement of our images. The inert and harsh object rejects whatever "meanings" we may give it: it is just there, confronting us, affirming its mute, terrible materiality in the face of all phantoms. This is what we call realism: to bring things to a distance, place them under a light, incline them in such a way that the stress falls upon the side which slopes down towards pure materiality.

The myth is always the starting point of all poetry, including the realistic, except that in the latter we accompany the myth in its descent, in its fall. The theme of realistic poetry is the crumbling of poetry.

I do not believe that reality can enter into art in any way other than by making an active and fighting element out of its own inertia and desolation. It cannot interest us by itself. Much less can its duplication interest us. I repeat what I said above: the characters of the novel lack attraction. How could then their representation move us? Nevertheless, it is so: the real things do not move us but their representation, that is to say, the representation of their reality does. This distinction is, in my opinion, decisive: the poetic quality of reality is not reality as this or that thing but reality as a generic function. Therefore it does not actually matter what objects the realist chooses to describe. Any one at all will do, since they all have an imaginary halo around them, and the point is to show the pure materiality under it. We see in this materiality a conclusive argument, a critical power which defeats the claims to self-sufficiency of all idealizations, wishes and fancies of man. The insufficiency, in a word, of culture, of all that is noble, clear, lofty—this is the significance of poetic realism. Cervantes recognizes that culture is all that, but that, alas, it is a fiction. Surrounding culture—as the puppet show of fancy was surrounded by the inn—lies the barbarous, brutal, mute, insignificant reality of things. It is sad that it is shown to us thus, but what can we do about it! It is real, it is there: it is terribly self-sufficient. Its force and its single meaning are rooted in its presence. Culture is memories and promises, an irreversible past, a dreamed future. But

¹⁰The intention of realism becomes still more obvious in painting. Raphael and Michelangelo paint the forms of things. The form is always ideal—an image of memory

reality is a simple and frightening "being there". It is a presence, a deposit, an inertia. It is materiality.¹⁰

14. *Mime*

It is clear that Cervantes does not invent *a nihilo* the poetic theme of reality: he simply carries it to a classical expansion. Until it finds in the novel, in *Don Quixote*, the organic structure which suits it, that theme has wandered like a tiny stream seeking its outlet, hesitating, feeling its way among obstacles, searching for a way around them, infiltrating other bodies. At any rate it has strange beginnings. It originates in the antipodes of the myth and the epic. To be precise it originates outside of literature.

The germ of realism is found in a certain impulse which forces man to imitate the outstanding characteristic of his fellows or of animals. That characteristic feature of a physiognomy—person, animal or thing—is so significant that, on being reproduced, it evokes in us the other characteristics, making them present to us quickly and vividly. However, one does not imitate for the sake of imitating: this imitative impulse—like the most complex forms of realism which have been described above—is not original, it is not self-created. It grows out of an extraneous aim. One imitates in order to mock. Here we have the origin for which we are searching: the mime. So that it is only through a comic intention that reality seems to acquire an aesthetic interest. This would be a very curious historical confirmation of what I have just said about the novel.

Actually in Greece, where poetry demands an ideal distance from every object in order to make it aesthetic, we only find everyday themes in comedy. Like Cervantes, Aristophanes makes use of the people he meets in the market place and introduces them into an artistic work, but he does it in order to make fun of them.

From comedy, dialogue originates in its turn—a genre which has not been able to achieve independence. Plato's dialogue also describes the real and also makes fun of the real. Whenever it goes beyond the comic it leans upon an extra-poetic interest—the scientific. This is a fact to keep in mind. The real, either as comedy

or a construction of ours. Velázquez seeks the impression of things. The impression is formless and stresses the material—satin, velvet, linen, wood, organic protoplasm—of which things are made.

or as science, may pass into poetry, but we never find the poetry of the real as simply real.

Here we have the only points of Greek literature to which we can fasten the thread of novelistic evolution.¹¹ The novel is born with a comic sting and it will preserve this garb forever. The criticism, the banter, is not a secondary ornament of *Don Quixote*, but forms the very texture of the genre, perhaps of all realism.

15. *The Hero*

So far we have not had the opportunity of looking carefully at the face of the comic. When I was writing that the novel shows us a mirage as such, the word comedy kept turning around the tip of my pen like a dog who hears a call. We do not know why a hidden likeness makes us compare the mirage over the burnt stubble fields with comedies in the souls of men.

The story forces us to turn back to our subject. We have left something hanging in mid-air, wavering between the room in the inn and Master Pedro's puppet show. This something is nothing less than the will of Don Quixote. People may be able to take happiness away from this neighbor of ours, but they will not be able to take away his energy and courage. His adventures may be the vapors of a fermenting brain, but his will for adventure is real and true. Now the adventure is a dislocation of the material order, something unreal. In this will for adventure, in this effort and courage, we find a strange dual nature. Its two elements belong to opposite worlds: the will is real but what is willed is not real.

A similar phenomenon is unknown in the epic. The men of Homer belong to the same world as their desires. Here we have, on the contrary, a man who wishes to reform reality. But isn't he a piece of that reality? Doesn't he live off it, isn't he a consequence of it? How is it possible for that which is not—the project of an adventure—to govern and make up the harsh reality? Perhaps it isn't possible, but it is a fact that men exist who are determined not to be contented with reality. Such men aim at altering the course of things; they refuse to repeat the gestures that custom, tradition, or biological instincts force them to make. These men we call heroes, because to be a hero means to be singled out, to be oneself.

¹¹The love story—the *Erotici*—proceeds from the new comedy. See Williamovitz-Moellendorf in *Greek Historical Writing*, 1908, pp. 22-23.

If we refuse to have our actions determined by heredity or environment it is because we seek to base the origin of our actions on ourselves and only on ourselves. The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. This will to be oneself is heroism.

I do not think that there is any more profound originality than this "practical", active originality of the hero. His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. Each movement that he makes has first needed to overcome custom and invent a new kind of gesture. Such a life is a perpetual pain, a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of the material.

16. Intervention of Lyricism

Now before the fact of heroic action—the will for adventure—only two attitudes can be taken: either we rush with it towards sorrow, because we consider that the heroic life has "meaning", or we give reality the slight push which is enough to destroy all heroism, as a dream is shattered by shaking the sleeper. Previously I have called these two directions of our interest, the straight and the oblique. It is now fitting to emphasize that the core of reality, to which both refer, is one and the same. The difference, then, comes from the subjective mood in which we approach it. So that, if the epic and the novel differ in the objectives—the past and reality—there is room for a new division within the theme of reality. But this division is no longer based purely on the object; it springs from a subjective element, from our attitude to that theme.

In the foregoing, lyricism, which is the other source of poetry as opposed to the epic, has been completely left out. It is not fitting in these pages to seek its essence nor to stop to meditate on what lyricism may be. The time for it will come again. Let it be sufficient to remember what is admitted by everyone: lyricism is an aesthetic projection of the general tonality of our feelings. The epic is neither sad nor gay: it is an Olympian, indifferent art full of forms of eternal, ageless objects; it is an extrinsic, invulnerable art.

A changeable and wavering substance enters art with lyricism. The sensibility of man varies in the course of the centuries, with its polarity gravitating, sometimes eastwards, sometimes westwards. There are gay times and times of bitterness. It all depends on

whether the balance which man makes of his own worth seems to him favorable or unfavorable in the last resort.

I do not believe that it was necessary to insist upon what was suggested at the beginning of this brief essay: that poetry and all art deals with the human and only the human—whether the theme of poetry consists of the past or the present. A landscape is always painted as a background for man. This being so, it cannot help but follow that all forms of art find their origin in the changing interpretations of man by man. Tell me what you feel about man and I shall tell you which art you cultivate.

Since every literary genre, even allowing for some marginal spread, is a river bed which one of these interpretations of man has opened up, nothing is less surprising than the preference of each epoch for a particular genre. Therefore, the genuine literature of a period is a general confession of the human spirit at that time.

Now, returning to the fact of heroism we note that sometimes it has been looked at directly and other times obliquely. In the first case, our glance changed the hero into an aesthetic object which we call tragedy. In the second, it made of him an aesthetic object which we call comedy. There have been periods which have had scarcely any feeling for the tragic, times saturated in humor and comedy. The 19th century—a bourgeois, democratic and positivist century—has been excessively inclined to see comedy on earth. The correlation which we have drawn between the epic and the novel is repeated here between the tragic and the comic tendency of our spirit.

17. Tragedy

A hero, I have said, is one who wants to be himself. The root of heroic action may be found then in a real act of the will. There is nothing like that in the epic. For this reason Don Quixote is not an epic figure, but he is a hero. Achilles makes the epopee, the hero wants it. So that the tragic character is not tragic, and therefore, poetic, in so far as he is a man of flesh and blood, but only in so far as he wills. The will—that paradoxical object which begins in reality and ends in the ideal, since one only wants what is not—is the tragic theme; and an epoch for which the will does not exist, a deterministic and Darwinian epoch, for example, cannot be interested in tragedy.

Let us not fix our attention too much on the Greek tragedy. If we are sincere, we shall admit that we do not understand it very well. Even philology has not equipped our understanding sufficiently to follow a Greek tragedy. Perhaps there is no production more interspersed with purely historical, transitory motives. We should not forget that in Athens it was a religious function, so that the play takes place within the hearts of the spectators even more than on the boards of the theatre. An extra-poetic atmosphere—religion—surrounds the stage and the audience. What has come down to us is like the libretto of an opera, the music of which we have never heard; or like the wrong side of a tapestry woven by faith, showing only the multicolored threads. The Hellenists are puzzled by the Athenians' faith, which they do not know how to reconstruct. Until they find out, Greek tragedy will be a page written in a language for which we do not have a dictionary.

All we see clearly is that the tragic poets of Greece speak to us personally through the masks of their heroes. When does Shakespeare do this? Aeschylus is inspired by a half poetic and half theological motive. His theme is at least as metaphysical and ethical as it is aesthetic. I would call him a *theopoet*. The problems of good and evil, of liberty, of justification, of order in the cosmos, of universal causes, trouble him. His works are a progressive series of attacks upon these divine questions. His inspiration seems rather like an impulse of religious reform. He resembles a Saint Paul or a Luther more than an "homme de lettres". By dint of piety he would like to go beyond a popular religion which is insufficient for the maturity of the times. In another place this impulse would not have led a man towards poetry, but in Greece, since religion was less sacerdotal, more flexible and more environmental, theological interest could be less differentiated from the poetic, the political and the philosophical.

Let us leave aside, then, Greek drama and all the theories which, basing tragedy on some fate or other, believe that it is the downfall, the death of the hero which gives it its tragic quality.

The intervention of fate is not necessary, and although the hero usually is overcome, the triumph of fate, if it does come, does not take away his heroism. Let us listen to the effect that the drama produces on the low-brow spectator. If he is sincere, he will not fail to confess to us that it really seems a little unlikely to him. Twenty times he has been tempted to get up and advise the pro-

tagonist to desist, to abandon his position, because the plain man very sensibly thinks that all the evil things happen to the hero through his persistence in such and such a purpose. By shirking it, everything would turn out well and, as the Chinese say at the end of a tale, alluding to their former nomadism, one could settle down and raise many children. There is no fate then, or rather what happens fatalistically happens thus because the hero has caused it. The misfortunes of Calderón's Constant Prince were fatalistic from the point when he decided to be constant, but he is not fatalistically constant.

I believe that the classical theories are the victims here of a simple *quid pro quo*, and that they should be corrected by taking advantage of the impression that heroism produces in the soul of the plain man incapable of heroic acts. The plain man is ignorant of that stratum of life in which only sumptuary, superfluous activities take place. He is ignorant of the overflow and excess of vitality. He lives bound to what is necessary, and what he does, he does perforce. He is always driven to act; his actions are reactions. He cannot conceive that anyone should get involved in affairs which are not his concern. Anyone who shows the will for adventure seems a little crazy to him, and in tragedy he sees only a man forced to suffer the consequences of an endeavour which no one forces him to pursue.

Far from the tragic originating in fate then, it is essential for the hero to want his tragic destiny. Therefore, tragedy always has a fictitious character when regarded from the point of view of the vegetative life. All the sorrow springs from the hero's refusal to give up an ideal part, an imaginary "role" which he has chosen. The actor in the drama, it might be said paradoxically, plays a part which is, in its turn, the playing of a part, although the latter is played in earnest. At any rate, free will starts and produces the tragic process. This "willing", creative of a new series of realities which only exist through it—the tragic order—is naturally a fiction for anyone whose only wishes are those of natural necessity, which is satisfied with what merely exists.

18. Comedy

Tragedy is not produced on our own level; we have to rise to it; we are drawn up to it. It is not real. If we wish to seek something

like it in existing things, we must raise our eyes and fix them on the highest peaks of history.

Tragedy supposes a predisposition towards great actions in our spirit; otherwise it will appear to us like boasting. It does not impose itself upon us with the obviousness and forcefulness of realism, which makes the work begin under our very feet and leads us into it without our being aware of it, passively. In a way, for us to enjoy tragedy it is necessary that we too want it a little as the hero wants his destiny. Consequently, it comes to prey upon the symptoms of atrophied heroism which may exist in us, because we all bear within us the rudiments of a hero; but once embarked along the heroic route we shall see that the strong movements and exalting impetus which inflate tragedy re-echo in our hearts. We shall find with surprise that we are capable of living at a tremendous tension and that everything around us increases its proportions and acquires a superior dignity. Tragedy in the theatre opens our eyes to discover and appreciate the heroic in reality. Thus Napoleon, who knew something of psychology, did not wish his travelling company to produce comedies before that audience of conquered sovereigns gathered during his stay in Frankfurt, and he made Talma present the characters of Racine and Corneille.

However, around the rudimentary hero that we carry within us swarms a crowd of plebeian instincts. For doubtless sufficient reasons, we usually cherish a great distrust towards anyone who wants to start new ways. We do not demand justification from those who do not try to step off the beaten track, but we peremptorily demand it from the bold man who tries to step off it. Our plebeian self hates few things more than it hates an ambitious person, and the hero, of course, begins by being ambitious. Vulgarity does not irritate us as much as pretentiousness. Hence the hero is always only a few inches from falling not into misfortune, for this would be rising to it, but into ridicule. The saying "from the sublime to the ridiculous" formulates this danger which really threatens the hero. Alas for him if he does not justify by an exuberance of greatness, by superlative qualities, his claim not to be like the rest of us, "like things are"! The reformer, the one who tries a new art, a new science, new politics, passes as long as he lives through a hostile, corrosive environment, which supposes him to be a conceited fellow, if not a fraud. He is up against that which, because he denies it, makes a hero of him: tradition, the accepted, the

customary, the uses of our parents, national customs; the typical total inertia, in a word. All this, accumulated in an age-old alluvium, forms a crust several yards deep; and the hero pretends to explode this weighty mass with an idea, which is less than an airy corpuscle suddenly sprung up in his fantasy. The instinct of inertia and preservation cannot tolerate it and it avenges itself. It sends realism against him and envelops him in comedy.

Since the character of the heroic lies in the will to be what one is not yet, the tragic protagonist is half outside reality. By being pulled by the feet and restored completely to reality, he becomes a comic character. The noble heroic fiction rises over and above the inertia of reality with difficulty, by dint of force; it lives by aspiration. The future bears witness to it. The *vis comica* simply accentuates the inclination of the hero towards pure materiality. Reality advances through the fiction, imposes itself on us and reabsorbs the tragic "role".¹² The hero made this role part of himself, he fused himself with it. The reabsorption consists in turning the aspiring intention of the hero into the solid matter of his body. In this fashion we see the "role" as a ridiculous disguise, as a mask beneath which a vulgar creature moves.

The hero anticipates the future and appeals to it. His gestures have a utopian significance. He does not say that he is but that he wants to be. Thus, the feminist woman hopes for the day when women do not need to be feminists. But the comic writer substitutes for the feminists' ideal the woman who today sustains that ideal upon her will. As something made to live in a future world, the ideal, when it is drawn back and frozen in the present, does not succeed in satisfying the most trivial functions of existence; and so people laugh. People watch the fall of the ideal bird as it flies over the vapor of stagnant water, and they laugh. It is a useful laughter: for each hero whom it hits, it crushes a hundred frauds.

Consequently, comedy lives on tragedy as the novel does on the epic. Comedy was born historically in Greece as a reaction against the tragic poets and the philosophers who wanted to introduce new gods and set up new customs. In the name of popular tradition, of "our forefathers", and of sacred customs, Aristophanes puts on

¹²Bergson cites a curious example. The Queen of Prussia enters the room where Napoleon is. She arrives furious, screaming and threatening. Napoleon confines himself to asking her to sit down. When the Queen sits down she is silent; the tragic "role" cannot be maintained in the bourgeois posture suitable for a visit, and it disintegrates upon its bearer.

stage the actual figures of Socrates and Euripides, and what the former put into his philosophy and the latter into his verses, Aristophanes puts in the persons of Socrates and Euripides.

Comedy is the literary genre of the conservative parties. The distance between the tragic and the comic is the same as that which exists between wishing to be and believing that one already is. This is the step from the sublime to the ridiculous. The transference on a heroic scale from the plane of will to that of perception causes the involution of tragedy, its disintegration—and makes comedy of it. The mirage is seen as nothing but mirage.

This happens with Don Quixote when, not content with affirming his desire for adventure, he persists in believing himself an adventurer. The immortal novel is in danger of becoming simply a comedy. The edge of a coin, as we have suggested, is all that separates the novel from pure comedy.

Such must have been the impression made upon the first readers of *Don Quixote* by its literary novelty. In the prologue of Avellaneda¹³ the point is made twice: "Since all the *Story of Don Quixote de la Mancha* is almost comedy", the abovementioned prologue begins, and adds later: "Let him [Cervantes] be content with his *Galatea* and comedies in prose, for most of his novels are that." These phrases are not sufficiently explained by observing that the generic name of all theatrical work was *comedia* at that time.

19. Tragicomedy

The novelistic genre is, doubtless, comic. Let us not say humorous, because many vanities hide beneath the cloak of humor. First of all it is simply a question of making use of the poetic significance there is in the violent fall of the tragic body, overcome by the force of inertia, by reality. When we talk of the realism of the novel we should note that there is something more than reality enclosed in that realism, something which allowed the latter to attain a poetry-inspiring power which is so alien to it. Then it would become evident that the poetry of realism does not lie in inert reality but in the force of attraction which reality exercises over meteor-like ideals.

The upper fringe of the novel is tragedy, from which the muse descends following the tragic in its fall. The tragic line is inevitable,

¹³[Author of an apocryphal Part II of *Don Quixote*.]

it must form part of the novel, if only as the very thin edge which limits it. For this reason, I believe that it is fitting to stick to the name sought for by Fernando de Rojas for his *Celestina*: tragic-comedy. The novel is a tragicomedy. Perhaps in *La Celestina* the evolution of this genre reaches a climax, acquiring a maturity which allows for full expansion in *Don Quixote*.

The tragic line, of course, may expand a great deal and even vie in scope and importance with the comic matter of the novel. All degrees and oscillations are possible here.

In the novel as a synthesis of tragedy and comedy, the strange desire hinted at by Plato without any comment has been fulfilled. It is at the Banquet¹⁴ in the early morning. The guests, overcome by the Bacchic juice, lie dozing in confusion. Aristodemus wakes vaguely "when the roosters are already crowing." He seems to see that only Socrates, Agathon and Aristophanes remain awake. He thinks he can hear them immersed in a difficult dialogue, in which Socrates argues against Agathon, the young author of tragedies, and Aristophanes, the comic writer, that the poet of tragedy and of comedy ought to be one and not two different men.

This episode has not been satisfactorily explained, but I have always suspected, when I read it, that Plato, a soul seething with intuitions, was planting here the seed of the novel. If we prolong the gesture made by Socrates from the *Symposium* in the pale light of dawn, it will seem as if we come up against Don Quixote, the hero and the madman.

20. Flaubert, Cervantes, Darwin

The sterility of what has usually been called patriotism in Spanish thought is made clear by the fact that the truly great Spanish deeds have not been studied sufficiently. Enthusiasm is wasted in sterile praise of what is not praiseworthy and cannot be applied with sufficient energy where it is most needed. There is need of a book showing in detail that every novel bears the *Don Quixote* within it like an inner filigree in the same way that every epic poem contains the *Iliad* within it like the fruit its core.

Flaubert is not bashful in proclaiming it: "Je retrouve," he says, "mes origines dans le livre que je savais par coeur avant de savoir lire, *Don Quichotte*."¹⁵ Madame Bovary is a Don Quixote in skirts with a minimum of tragedy in her soul. She is a reader of romantic

¹⁴[*Symposium*.]

¹⁵*Correspondance*, II, 16.

novels and a representative of the bourgeois ideals which have hovered over Europe for half a century. Wretched ideals! Bourgeois democracy, positivist romanticism!

Flaubert fully realizes that the novelistic art is a genre with critical intention and comic nerve: "Je tourne beaucoup à la critique," he writes at the time that he is composing *Bovary*; "le roman que j'écris m'aiguise cette faculté, car c'est une oeuvre surtout de critique ou plutôt d'anatomie."¹⁶ And in another place: "Ah! Ce qui manque à la société moderne ce n'est pas un Christ, ni un Washington, ni un Socrate, ni un Voltaire, c'est un Aristophane."¹⁷ I believe that in matters of realism Flaubert would not appear suspect, and that he will be accepted as an unimpeachable witness.

If the contemporary novel makes its comic mechanism less obvious, it is due to the fact that the ideals attacked by it are hardly removed from the reality with which they are attacked. The tension is very weak: the ideal falls from a very small height. For this reason it can be predicted that the novel of the 19th century will be unreadable very soon: it contains the least possible amount of poetic energy. Even today we are surprised that when a book of Daudet or of Maupassant falls into our hands we do not feel the same pleasure that we felt fifteen years ago, whilst the tension of *Don Quixote* promises never to slacken.

The ideal of the 19th century was realism. "Facts, only facts", clamors a Dickensian character in *Hard Times*. The how, not the why; the fact, not the idea, preaches Auguste Comte. Madame Bovary breathes the same air as M. Homais—a Comtist atmosphere. Flaubert reads *Positivist Philosophy* while he is writing his novel: "[C]'est un ouvrage," he says "profondément farce; il faut seulement lire, pour s'en convaincre, l'introduction qui en est le résumé, il y a, pour quelqu'un qui voudrait faire des charges au théâtre dans le goût aristophanesque, sur les théories sociales, des californies de rires."¹⁸

Reality has such a vile temper that it does not tolerate the ideal even when reality itself is idealized. The 19th century, not satisfied with raising the negation of all heroism to a heroic form and enthroning the idea of the positive, subjects this aim again to the ordeal of harsh reality. An extremely characteristic phrase escapes Flaubert: "On me croit épris du réel, tandis que je l'exècre; car c'est en haine du réalisme que j'ai entrepris ce roman."¹⁹

¹⁶*Ibid.* 370.

¹⁷*Ibid.* 159.

¹⁸*Loc. cit.* II. 261.

¹⁹*Correspondance*, III, 67-68. See what he writes on his *Dictionary of Commonplaces*: Gustavus Flaubertus, Bourgeoisophobus.

These generations from which we are directly descended had taken a fatal stance. In *Don Quixote* the balance of poetic sensibility is already tipping towards the side of bitterness, and it has not even in our day fully recovered. This century, our parent, has felt a perverse delight in pessimism: it has wallowed in it, it has drunk it to the last drop and has squeezed the world in such a way that nothing erected on it could remain standing. A sort of gust of animosity is blown onto us by this whole century.

The natural sciences based on determinism had conquered the field of biology during the first decades of the 19th century. Darwin believed he had succeeded in imprisoning life—our last hope—within physical necessity. Life is reduced to mere matter, physiology to mechanics.

The human organism, which seemed an independent unit, capable of acting by itself, is placed in the physical medium like a figure in a tapestry. It is no longer the organism which moves, but the medium which is moving through it. Our actions are no more than reactions. There is no freedom, no originality. To live is to adapt oneself; to adapt oneself is to allow material environment to penetrate into us, to drive us out of ourselves. Adaptation is submission and renunciation. Darwin sweeps the heroes off the face of the earth.

The hour of the “roman expérimental” arrives. Zola does not learn his poetry either from Homer or Shakespeare but from Claude Bernard. The subject matter is always man, but since man is no longer the agent of his acts but is moved by the environment in which he lives, the novel will look for the representation of the environment. The environment is the only protagonist.

One speaks of evoking the “atmosphere”. Art submits to one rule: verisimilitude. But does not tragedy have its own internal, independent verisimilitude? Isn’t there an aesthetic *vero*—the beautiful? And a likeness of the beautiful? The answer is *no* according to positivism: the beautiful is the likely and the true lies only in physics. The aim of the novel is physiology.

One night Bouvard and Pécuchet buried poetry in the Cemetery of Père Lachaise—in honor of verisimilitude and determinism.

[Translated from the Spanish by Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marín]

WILLIAM MEREDITH

The Chinese Banyan Tree

There is no end to the
Deception of quiet things
And of quiet, everyday
People a lifetime brings.
Take a kind of Banyan tree
That grows in the temperate islands
Where a friend lived recently:
With what commendable violence
The shallow roots—as blunt
As earthworms in the dark,
As blunt and as unremarked—
Make for what they want.
At night on their way to drink
They will rend like little dooms
(The last thing you would think)
Impediments of stone;
The last thing in the world
You would think of, seeing the crown
Of pale leaves just unfurled
That the breeze moves up and down.

And the friend himself who stayed
In the islands, his small roof
Taking a Banyan's shade—
That life was quiet enough:
Teacher and bachelor,
Hard forces both to measure.
With Sammy, a small white cur
Who would dance or yap for pleasure,
He lived in the four-room house
Under the small-leafed tree
Where counter to his wish
We said an obsequy.
The water had run in the sink
All night, for his heart had burst
While he drew the dog a drink;

And what he muttered first
Only Sammy the dog knew
Who stayed in the kitchen till dawn
As dogs have agreed to do.
A quiet, temperate man;
We have all known dearer loss.
But I speak of the unremarked
Forces that split the heart
And make the pavement toss:
Forces concealed in quiet
People and plants, until,
At some silent blood riot
Or sap riot, they spill
And this dark capacity
Of quiet looses a fear
That runs by analogy
On your page, in your house, for your dear.

ANTHONY HECHT

The Vow

In the third month, a sudden flow of blood.
The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, and the joy
Also of the harp. The frail image of God
Lay spilled and formless. Neither girl nor boy,
But yet blood of my blood, nearly my child.

 All that long day
Her pale face turned to the window's mild
 Featureless grey.

And for some nights she whimpered as she dreamed
The dead thing spoke, saying: "Do not recall
Pleasure at my conception. I am redeemed
From pain and sorrow. Mourn rather for all
Who breathlessly issue from the bone gates,
 The gates of horn,
For truly it is best of all the fates
 Not to be born.

"Mother, a child lay gasping for bare breath
On Christmas Eve, when Santa Claus had set
Death in the stocking, and the lights of death
Flamed in the tree. O, if you can, forget
You were the child, turn to my father's lips
 Against the time
When his cold hand puts forth its fingertips
 Of jointed lime."

Doctors of Science, what is man that he
Should hope to come to a good end? *The best*
Is not to have been born. And could it be
That Jewish diligence and Irish jest
The consent of flesh and a midwinter storm
 Had reconciled,
Was yet too bold a mixture to inform
 A simple child?

Even as gold is tried, Gentile and Jew.
If that ghost was a girl's, I swear to it:
Your mother shall be far more blessed than you.
And if a boy's, I swear: The flames are lit
That shall refine us; they shall not destroy
 A living hair.
Your younger brothers shall confirm in joy
 This that I swear.

The Origin of Centaurs

“But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiend's.”

—*King Lear*

This mild September mist recalls the soul
 To its own lust;
 On the enchanted lawn
It sees the iron top of the flagpole
 Sublimed away and gone
Into Parnassian regions beyond rust;
And would undo the body to less than dust.

Sundial and juniper have been dispelled
 Into thin air.
 The pale ghost of a leaf
Haunts those uncanny softnesses that felled
 And whitely brought to grief
The trees that only yesterday were there.
The soul recoils into its old despair,

Knowing that though the horizon is at hand,
 Twelve paltry feet
 Refuse to be traversed,
And form themselves before wherever you stand
 As if you were accursed;
While stones drift from the field, and the arbor-seat
Floats toward some *millefleurs* world of summer heat.

Yet from the void where the azalea bush
 Departed hence,
 Sadly the soul must hear
Twitter and cricket where should be all hush,
 And from the belvedere
A muffled grunt survives in evidence
That love must sweat under the weight of sense.

Or so once thought a man in a Greek mist—
 Who set aside
 The wine-cup and the wine,
And that deep fissure he alone had kissed,
 All circumscribing line,
Moved to the very edge in one swift stride
And took those shawls of nothing for his bride.

Was it the Goddess herself? Some dense embrace
 Closed like a bath
 Of love about his head;
Perfectly silent and without a face.
 Blindfolded on her bed,
He could see nothing but the aftermath:
Those powerful clear hoofprints on the path.

W. D. SNODGRASS

April Inventory

The green catalpa tree has turned
All white; the cherry blooms once more.
In one whole year I haven't learned
A blessed thing they pay you for.
The blossoms snow down in my hair;
The trees and I will soon be bare.

The trees have more than I to spare.
The sleek, expensive girls I teach,
Younger and pinker every year,
Bloom gradually out of reach.
The pear tree lets its petals drop
Like dandruff on a tabletop.

The girls have grown so girlish now
I have to nudge myself to stare.
This year they smile and mind me how
My teeth are falling with my hair.
In thirty years I may not get
Younger, shrewder, or out of debt.

The tenth time, just a year ago,
I made myself a little list
Of all the things I'd ought to know,
Then told my parents, analyst,
And everyone who's trusted me
I'd be substantial, presently.

I haven't read one book about
A book or memorized one plot.
Or found a mind I did not doubt.
I learned one date. And then forgot.
And one by one the solid scholars
Get the degrees, the jobs, the dollars.

And smile above their starchy collars.
I taught my classes Whitehead's notions;
One lovely girl, a song of Mahler's.
Lacking a source book and promotions,
I taught one child the colors of
A luna moth and how to love.

I taught myself to name my name,
To bark back, loosen love and crying;
To ease my woman so she came,
To ease an old man who was dying.
I have not learned how often I
Can win, can love, but choose to die.

I have not learned there is a lie
Love shall be blonder, slimmer, younger;
That my equivocating eye
Loves only by my body's hunger;
That I have forces, true to feel,
Or that the lovely world is real.

While scholars speak authority
And wear their ulcers on their sleeves,
My eyes in spectacles shall see
These trees procure and spend their leaves.
There is a value underneath
The gold and silver in my teeth.

Though trees turn bare and girls turn wives,
We shall afford our costly seasons;
There is a gentleness survives
That will outspcak and has its reasons.
There is a loveliness exists,
Preserves us; not for specialists.

Returned to Frisco, 1946

We shouldered like pigs along the rail to try
And catch that first grey outline of the shore
Of our first life. A plane hung in the sky
From which a girl's voice sang: "...you're home once more."

Then, in that moment, we were dulled and shaken
With fear. What still could catch us by surprise?
We had known all along we would be taken
By hawkers, known what authoritative lies

Would plan us as the old lives had been planned.
We had stood years and, then, scrambled like rabbits
Up hostile beaches; why should we fear this land
Swaddled in luxuries and its old habits?

A seagull shrieked for garbage. The Bay Bridge,
Busy with noontime traffic, rose ahead.
We would have liberty, the privilege
Of lingering over steak and white, soft bread

Served by women, free to get drunk or fight,
Free, if we chose, to blow in our back pay
On smart girls or trinkets, free to prowls all night
Down streets giddy with lights, to sleep all day,

To pay our own way, make our own selections,
Free to choose just what they'd said we should,
Turning, at last, back to the old affections,
Ties that had lasted and which must be good.

Off the port side, through haze, we could discern
The Rock, all lavender with flowers. Barred,
The Golden Gate, fading away astern,
Stood like the closed gate of your own backyard.

Song: Digging up the Garden

Observe the cautious toadstools
still on the lawn today
though they grow over-evening;
sun shrinks them away.
Pale and proper and rootless,
they righteously extort
their living from the living.
I have been their sort.

See by our blocked foundation
the cold, archaic clay,
stiff and clinging and sterile
as children mold at play
or as the Lord God fashioned
before he breathed it breath.
The earth we dig and carry
for flowers, is strong in death.

Woman, we are the rich
soil, friable and humble,
where all our murders rot,
where our old deaths crumble
and fortify my reach
far from you, wide and free,
though I have set my root
in you and am your tree.

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Matisse

The swift incursions of the sun
Through palms beyond the window made
The room coruscant, bayadere,
A pool where deep transversions etched
Splendors, unseen, from air, from air—
Fortunate attitudes of blue,
Azure in shadows which were brune,
Soft sea-like surges, *lento*, poised,
All fanfares of the reeling blue
Stabbed by a mote of wild cerise—
Not seen, under the old *chicane*
Of pose and memory, not seen
From the complacent chaise, not even
By her, the poseuse, sitting there.
And ah, how is it now we know
These emanations, tinglings, glows,
Prismatic raptures flowing, real
And rare, out from the world of lines?
As if imagination dwelt
In the smoky sunlight, probing where
It fell—the stones! the arms and heads!
The balustrades! — a moody gist
Emerged in undissembling hues,
But no, imagination's sun
Streamed only in the brush, Maestro,
For which the dogmas of our thanks.

Cappadocian Song

What shall the poor girls do
When men are gone warring?
Long shadows run us through
And fork us at morning.

*The barley stalk breaks in the field,
The little mice play on the road.*

What's worse than a mad king?
Cambyses killed his brother,
Darius heard a bee sing,
Xerxes ate clover.

*The barley stalk breaks in the field,
The little mice play on the road.*

Millions they took away,
My own, my sister's.
Now the old crones say
They're over the waters.

*The barley stalk breaks in the field,
The little mice play on the road.*

Does hunger fill my eye?
Dust fills the meadow.
We were born at the end of time
In the moon's shadow.

*The barley stalk breaks in the field,
The little mice play on the road.*

WILLIAM DICKEY

The Plot

Beatrice lay naked on the narrow bed;
"I'm half in love with easeful death," she said.
"And so am I," I said without delay,
"But once you've got him, how will you make him stay?"
"By woman's wiles and by ambitious kisses;
He can't be satisfied with those skeleton blisses,
Those beds on which an atomy reposes—
I'll give him flesh like concentrate of roses.
The change will make a man of him again."
"I grant you that," I said. "What happens then?"
"Then I deceive him carefully," she said,
"I leave him soundly sleeping, and I tread
On airy foot in search of certain potions,
Somniferous drugs and faint, Lethean lotions.
I scatter poppy near him as he slumbers,
I tell off charms and cabalistic numbers—"
"He sleeps?" "He sleeps forever and a day,
He sleeps the eternity of the world away."
"He leaves us free for our desired pursuing?"
"He leaves us free for doing and undoing;
And safe from travelling through that ominous portal,
We'll have our pleasure, mortal and immortal."

Twenty Years Gone, She Returns to The Nunnery

The color bleaches from her hair;
Once black, she is now wholly fair.
Housewives who cried her out a whore
Find her not as she was before.

And changed the color of her breast;
Feeling too naked, she has dressed
Herself up over the collar bone
Into a reticence of gown.

Now in her face the smile is white
Like pure transparencies of light,
And disappear the copious red
Kisses she gave in her dark bed.

All is renewed about her form
Since mortal body took no harm,
Moved by an aptitude too clear
For argument to reach her ear.

Finally she comes where she would come,
Enters this house she went out from,
And in the cavern of her breast
Her heart lies like a lamb at rest.

The tall men fade, the dark men dare
No longer to inhabit her
Who is now made the tenement
Of a more masculine intent.

One Incident of Many

Turning clumsily into the embrace
She finds herself stopped by uncertainty.
It is not so dark that she cannot see his face
Looking up into the rain. Can he suppose that she
Came toward this kiss without encouragement?
Has she been reading into his every act
What she wants, and only cold kindness was meant?

The night is like a tunnel around her head.
She is in love, it is the time for her
To be reassured. He is like something dead.
Surely if she speaks that nothingness will stir,
Take her in its arms, be man, sweat and desire,
Show her the mutual fire to her fire.

She is quiet. It was wrong to want what anyone gets.
No, he will say, somehow you've misunderstood.

If she beats her hands against him he will be good,
Saying, it was my fault, saying, one forgets
How it is. She has forgotten herself again,
Thinking something important had supplanted her.
She is as ignorant as ever, and as plain.

The night will pass, and its possibility,
The trees that seemed for a moment neutral there
In the fresh burst of the stayed, certain air
Will lash and cringe about her face as she
Turns up the walk she has turned up before,
Hurries, holding her coat about her head.
He need not trouble to see her to her door.

As Much as He Could Learn

As much as he could learn has done no good.
Where the complexities started, there he stands
Looking attentively at his two hands
That ought to point the way out of the wood.
They point to nothing. They curl in and rest.

Around him in the thicket bird and beast
Give birth or die in a repeated way;
God moulds the human animal out of clay.
The animal takes breath, then does its best.
Its best is good enough. Its bones decay.

The animal put by, how will he know—
Lacking that murderous heart—the innocent track?
Who knows enough to go forward or go back?
Generations of chattering mannikins sprout and grow
While he stands reasoning the first attack.

As much as he could learn has done no good.
Logic of Aristotle fills his brain.
Non-Aristotelean monkey noises reign
Carnal and bloody in that primitive wood
Where his hands twitch and then curl in again.

DONALD JUSTICE

Thus

As for the key, we know it must be minor.
B minor, then, as having passed for noble
On one or two occasions. As for the theme,
There being but the one, with variations,
Let it be spoken outright by the oboe
Without apology of any string,
But as a man speaks, openly, his heart
Among old friends, let this be spoken.

Thus.

A major resolution of the minor,
Johann's great signature, would be too noble,
And it would do some violence to our theme.
Therefore, see to it that the variations
Keep faith with the plain statement of the oboe.
Bowing the minor, let each chastened string
Repeat the lesson she must get by heart,
And without overmuch adornment.

Thus.

Sonnet

A woman I knew had seemed most beautiful
For being cold and difficult of access.
My friend I saw, the cleverest man of us,
But for a word from her to make him whole,
Himself fall speechless, like a boy at school,
And others also, followers of the chase,
Look up or down but not into that face,
Owing to the perfection of the skull.
I knew this lady a dozen years ago.
Since, that she has to two or three been kind,
After long siege, and these not of her sort,
And that she has both given and taken hurt,
Hearing all this, and more, I call to mind
That high, improbable bosom, which was snow.

Sestina on Six Words by Weldon Kees

I often wonder about the others,
Where they are bound for on the voyage,
What is the reason for their silence,
Was there some reason to go away?
It may be they carry a dark burden,
Expect some harm, or have done harm.

How can we show we mean no harm?
Approach them? But they shy from others.
Offer, perhaps, to share the burden?
They change the subject to the voyage
Or turn abruptly, walk away,
To brood against the rail in silence.

What is defeated by their silence
More than love, less than harm?
Many already are looking their way,
Pretending not to. Eyes of others
Will follow them now the whole voyage
And add a little to the burden.

Others touch hands to ease the burden,
Or stroll, companionable in silence,
Counting the stars which bless the voyage,
But let the foghorn speak of harm,
They also stammer like the others,
Their hands seem in each other's way.

It is so obvious in a way.
Each is alone, each with his burden.
To others, always, they are others,
And they can never break the silence,
Say, lightly, *thou*, but to their harm
Although they make many a voyage.

What have they wished for from the voyage
But to awaken far away,
By miracle free from every harm,
Hearing at dawn that sweet burden
The birds cry after a long silence?
Where is that country not like others?

There is no way to ease the burden.
The voyage leads on from harm to harm,
A land of others and of silence.

HENRI COULETTE

Cry Figs

Cry figs, my love, on totem and taboo,
And end this argument, for we agree
That, in the dark, the darkness takes its due,

For we agree on what we always knew:
The heart moves quicker than the eye can see.
Cry figs, my love, on totem and taboo,

And sigh, for hearts, like lions in a zoo,
Dream of a country where the wild are free,
Where, in the dark, the darkness takes its due.

Copy the vine which, wandering as it grew,
Reached heaven in the branches of a tree:
Cry figs, my love, on totem and taboo.

At last! the sun is fading—that's our cue;
This bed's our stage; those stars our gallery.
When, in the dark, the darkness takes its due

And I, beloved, tremble next to you,
Laugh in my ear and whisper this to me:
Cry figs, my love, on totem and taboo . . .
Now, in the dark, the darkness takes it due.

Intaglio

I have a picture in my room in which
Four gawky children strike a pose and stare
Out at the world, without a worldly care.
Three girls and a boy in a paper hat:
The one too much a mouse to be a bitch,
The bitch, the actress, and the acrobat.

The roles I give them, half suggested by
The poses that they took, are meaningless,
For they are playing games. It is recess
Or summer—we have interrupted them.
They pose for us, with Agile romping by
And dark-eyed Pensive plucking at her hem.

This is my family. I dust them now
And then, and they return the courtesy
By never growing up. Thus, irony
Becomes a kind of family likeness, treasured
Not for the casual sameness of a brow
But for the attitudes one's mind has measured.

I knew an Agile once. To prove himself
The nimbler one, he pushed his books aside,
And crossed to Europe and the war, and died,
And his agility, which I believed a power
Then, then was gone, and his books on my shelf
Harvest the sunlit dust, hour after hour.

And there was Pensive, too, and everything
She touched was touched with fear. She married well,
The people said, but marriage proves a hell
For those who marry but the flesh alone.
Who would have known a turn of mind could bring
Such knowledge to a girl? Who would have known?

I think of her, the child with heavy heart,
Heavy with child, and, Child, I think of you
And all the follies you will blunder through;
I know them as an author knows his book.
Action and thought are nothing if apart.
Love in a gesture, wisdom in a look—

These are the real births for which we die.
Outside, the neighbor children startle me,
Calling, "Allee, allecoutsinfree."
They cut for home. I hear a whirring skate
Fading through the darkness like a sigh.
I dust the frame and set the picture straight.

RONALD L. PERRY

Sonata For Percussion

1

The Emperor walked in the Roman garden
And the wind whistled on the white tiles.

“Death,” he said, speaking to the royal
Flamingoes, who knew what he was about.

“Death,” he said, and the flamingoes
Listened with a gesture of their wings.

Outside a bronze centurion with a hammered
Shield waited while a gong was struck.

2

He was the people's
Dying swan, moved
Through the world
Like a little ballet,
Dipping and bowing.

When the antique triangle
Or drum displaced
The patterns of the air,
The royal flamingoes,
In their tents of ivory
And cloth-of-gold,
Clapped their glowing wings.

“Death,” he said.
The wind spoke
A similar language.

3

Now all the stilted world rushes,
On the legs of birds, to Death.

The wind whistles on the white tiles,
And in the red houses of birds.

The centurion leans into the wind
And listens for the distant roll of drums.

The wind speaks a similar language.

The Keeper of the Birds

1

The weather and the waterfowl are different reflections
Of a similar idea: both tend towards the same gray.

Fall yellow and winter gray. The flight of cardinals
At dusk, and all the multiple dimensions of birds.

The world is their artifice and dimension, flying
And falling into the sun, far away flying and falling.

2

I have experienced an urge to drown;
Heard cymbals in the ordered sky,
Like the distant beat of wings.

I have proclaimed myself an honest
Man, and recognize the world
For what it is: faint echoing
Of flute, or tambourine, or drum.

And I have heard the music of the mind,
Where crow and cardinal descend,
Flat falls of black and red.

3

I have seen the water birds dip and dive
In the secret country behind the eyes;

Have heard the silent whimpering of dove—
Believed myself a part of these—the curled

Leaves flying and falling, the gulls raging
Like a white storm over the sea; have been,

Or seen, or done, or am, and still
I am apart. The world is their surprise.

Chaconne

1

She is familiar with the patterns of silence:
The shifting of wind in an empty world, the lines
Crossing, heat rising, voyages of the sun or moon—

The lines beneath lines and through lines
Turning, like the whistle of the green bird
That cannot be heard: all the thousand intimations

Of splendor. As, for example, the gesture
Of the parrot's burning wing dissolves.
Or the red woman bends at the waist and talks

To a bird. For her the dry phenomenon
Of slightest sound is more than an event.
It is an experience, like color.

2

The wind shifts in a leaf, in a world.
The shrill scream of parrot or cockatoo

Burns the air green, and vibrates against
The nerve. The chattering of the ape,

The movement of the sudden storm, jaguar
In the crouching thicket, burning and turning.

These are seen with the ear, are heard
With the eye. In the bright red morning

The listening woman at the door traces,
With crooked finger, the few colors of the wind.

Islemorada

How long until the sun will sing
Like that again? how many
Months of wind and wind?

The gulls are gone South,
To Trinidad. The aviaries
Are empty under the cliff.

What can the dancers say
At midnight with their wings
That we have not already heard?

What can they say with their drums?

HERBERT GOLD

Paris and Cleveland are Voyages

“—for all those who step the legend
of their youth into the noon.”

EVEN BEFORE HE noticed the girl, he had already taken to the easy habit of strolling into this panelled, chandeliered, and interior-decorated suburban library of a late afternoon in Cleveland. He liked to pry on the travel writers gasping over the places where he had spent his wanderyears with Helen: Paris, Florence, other pleasant towns. Nothing is so mysterious as the description by a stranger of a well-loved old friend. Such dimwitted joy in these arty photographs! What smiles for him in the mislabeled halftint of the very street on which he had lived in Montparnasse! “A meal can be obtained on the Left Bank of Paris for three to five dollars. Wine not included.” (When did Helen and Gran pay so much except under the obligation of a holiday or a visitor?) “The greedy life pulses on Saturday night in Naples. A good nylon dress is recommended.” (Apparently the lady expected to be eaten by some greedy pulser, gobble-gobble, buttons, and all.)

Who was this girl approaching his table near the travel section? He recognized Elliot Paul in her pretty little hands. The poor child probably wanted to dream that the rue de la Huchette would be the last time she saw Paris, too.

Today he would try the Blue Guide to Italy and maybe Paul Morand, a native wanderer, on Paris. With a luxurious sigh, he sat down near the girl. Dr. Granley Hattan allowed himself this smugness of nostalgia in his afternoon pleasures, the pleasures of loneliness at thirty when Bohemian days are past and the kid makes too much noise to let him work at home and the thesis is published (“Francois Mauriac: A Double Regard”) and his tenure and rank as Assistant Professor at Western Reserve University are assured and maybe he doesn’t have anything better to do anyway.

“Excuse me,” he said to the girl, just touching her purse to move it. Otherwise it would look as if they were together.

She did not answer. Could Elliott Paul's prose be so loud as to deafen her? Gran was suddenly aware of his crew-cut hair and the touch of useful premature gray in it and his whole lounging length of critical body. She moved the purse and moved so that the long red scarf still hanging from her shoulders—as if she had been so eager to get to the rue de la Huchette that she could not undo her clothes—touched his knee as it fell.

That was a kind of answer to him, Granley Hattan decided. A nice rise and fall of breathing at her small intent leaning body. Without a word he picked up her scarf and put it on the table.

2

College girl in velvet slacks, red canvas shoes with white crepe soles, fine tweed coat thrown over these items, that red scarf undone but never taken off, carelessly cropped hair, crisp little ears, strong small pretty animal mug of a face, a bright girl with her own ideas (the studied sloppiness) and a moneyed father (the coat)—these were Gran's notes on her into the pages of the book he thought he was reading. She was flushed with Elliot Paul, actually copying out phrases! The leather notebook and the chewed pencil were a studious touch, and the brightness and pallor perhaps stood for impatience with that rich father of hers.

Gran congratulated himself for knowing her well. This was not the kind that sat in the front row to try for an A by showing its knees; this was the kind that learned all the forms of "etre" and "avoir" and read *Le Livre de Mon Ami* as if Anatole France meant something. Maybe this one even wrote poetry.

But it was odd how the fact of seeing her for the first time in the suburb, off-campus, made her different. Her body had the alert charm of youth, the trust in that charm, and the babyfat gone. Looking about at the vaulted churchlike fakery of this suburban branch library, he thought of his graduate course, French 410. Didn't the lovers meet in churches for Stendhal? Of course, travel folders and annotated memoirs could never replace the door to the confessional.

"Oh damn."

"Pardon?"

"Oh damn," she whispered to him, insisting on it. "Can you lend me a pencil?"

He grinned and touched the scarf. You broke it on purpose, he

wanted to say, but said instead: "Surely, but if you take notes on Paris, at least don't read Elliot Paul. That's for school-teacher tourists."

"How do you know?" And she answered the question herself: "You've been there?"

He knew by the way she said *there* that the sea was steady and the winds favorable. "How about some coffee and I'll tell you all about it."

"Yes," she said simply, packing up.

They strolled out together. She was an inch or so shorter than Helen, not her willowy type at all, but nicely turned. Helen, his wife, had worn her hair long at this girl's age, clipped in a ponytail behind. He had taken Helen's prettiness as the normal thing, his right at the time; perhaps it was; yet now in this strange girl at the same age ten years later, he was astonished at so much unmarked beauty, unquarreled, unsuffered, pouting and dusky only with resentment of parents. Yes, the freshness of her skin went nicely with the dark disputing rings under her eyes. Helen had not had them; she was another sort, married young for other reasons—pure gaiety perhaps, so romantic, blind, easy, and fixed in her own family that she could not suspect how hard it is to live in family.

The librarian's hairy librarian-face turned on them, but it meant nothing. They could be fellow students, neighbors—they probably were near neighbors, anyway. He still looked young enough to be a graduate student. Down the steps, he watched this girl again, thinking of his wife and of himself. He had hickies on his nose then—the word was still *hickies*?—and his pictures showed him too-smooth, untried. Surely he was better-looking now at thirty, the youthful spring of his step chiming well with the fret of thought in his face; experienced laughter is best, less braying.

"What's your name?"

"Carol."

"I'm Gran Hattan."

"Carol Dent," she said. He liked the way she gave her first name alone, as if they were playmates. Apparently she did not know that he was Dr. Hattan, the new man in Romance Languages. As if to answer this thought, she added, "I've seen you on campus. I saw you here yesterday, but you didn't see me. I knew you spent two years in Paris, wasn't it?" She looked at him with

her bright red lips damp and slightly parted: "It's my *dream*."

Gran laughed softly because it was such a childish thing to say and because it nevertheless told the truth about a bright and adventurous suburban coed. Her saying it like that, *dream*, sent an odd little shiver up his back; perhaps she meant it to. Helen and he must have said it the same way.

"Funny thing," he answered, "this beer place at the corner serves the best coffee in the neighborhood. You usually don't find that at bars. I had a Fulbright in '49—first year it was. We were the forty-niners with our meat cards and travel allowances and our leftover khakis to sell to the Arabs. We were some smart babies!"

"But that wasn't really so long ago, Gran."

3

This was only the first time that she read his thoughts with such flashing amusement. I'm older than you, he had meant to say. Six years ago was another age: we all still had boots and field jackets.

O not that much older, dear, her smile with buds of teeth replied. Clothes are only clothes, something to sell to the Arabs for a silkscreen print or an album of Gregorian. Bop existed already; so did Van Gogh and the uplift bra—even if we called bop "bebop" at Shaker High.

But then the baby fat would suddenly reappear, softly enveloping her understanding of him in the book-struck, dream-struck, mirror-struck adolescent's pout: "I'm perishing for St.-Germain-des-Près, Gran. Is it true they've remodeled the Dome? It's one tricky job convincing Dad how Paris won't ruin me for life. Really, he's a pain sometimes. Used to read books, but you'd never know it now with the television." And she tossed her head, which made the scarfends twirl. He had been touching them with his hand again.

"Don't try to reform your father, it never works," he said. "Just get your way out of him if you can, it's the most you can expect."

"You've escaped the father image, huh? Luck plus hard work at independence, I'll bet. How old were you? I will, too, I escaped Mom's domination in junior high already, and without turning dike, either."

"Congratulations. Lucky men of this world."

"Don't tease me, Gran, this is serious to a girl." She smiled—where had she learned that nose, that quirk of grin?—and sat very still for an instant. Untroubled by her bold words, she now blushed a new thought and leaned forward with her smile renewed and whispered near his ear—she didn't have to, but she did—"I'd take a beer, but wouldn't it be embarrassing if they asked for identification? I'd die—"

"Of mortification?"

She gave him the turning-away three-quarter view. "Of embarrassment. I wouldn't *ever* say mortified, Gran. You're not sardonic at all today, you're only sarcastic."

He understood that she expected him to do better than coffee for himself. Wine in a neighborhood bar would precipitate a bad case of sarcasm at the eyes; he wanted to take himself seriously. Beer the same at the mouth-corners—too obedient to Carol. Oh Lord, someone had told her she looked like a dark Audrey Hepburn. He ordered and reverently nursed a bourbon on the rocks. She tapped her ashes into her saucer and watched him meditatively. Now not A. Hepburn, she was Vivien Leigh with *phi bete* her junior year and Olivier and anxiety yet to come. This silence, fine-eyed and brooding, was succeeded by the information that she had memorized more than half of "Le Cimetière Marin" and read Valéry's letters about it in the original.

They talked. They measured each other coolly but with a satisfaction which they were proud to admit. It's not so often you can be honest about liking a person, as Carol pointed out. You've got to have an agreement about basic personality. The bar, carved, panelled, and stain-glassed like the library, seemed to both of them the right sort of Elizabethan pub to be designed by a Cornell architect.

Late one afternoon, the third time that, without spoken arrangement, they had met at the library, she put out her cigarette decisively just as he said, "Carol, whatever made you start about the Dome? That's Montparnasse, by the way—"

"Tell me about your wife," she demanded. "What's she like? What time do you have to be home for dinner?"

"Such curiosity! Which are you interested in, what she's like or when I have to be home?"

"Oh!" Boldness is fine, rather exciting, her piping *oh* seemed to say; indiscretion, however, is too much, and sometimes sordid.

She pouted and withdrew her hand. He had been touching her fingertips over the table. This time she had removed the scarf and the short tweed coat, and his heart was sharp and busy within him at the sight of her untried ripeness, her sharp, flesh-and-muscle, held-in, held-out body, the rich expense of well-tended woman rising and falling beneath sweater and fitted skirt.

"Carol, you're an extraordinary girl," he said.

She was not answering. He needed punishment.

Could he tell her about Helen? That she was too thin to be worried about getting fat but she worried all the same. That she took care of their boy as if he were precious silver that had to be polished and wrapped and stored or it would tarnish to death. (Gran Hattan was dissatisfied already with his mama-calling six-year-old—a softness in him, a female dependency of spirit. Bud wasn't his vision of a son, who should be shrill, tough, and bruised by hard play.) And that Helen and he quarreled over buying better furniture than they could afford—dare he tell Carol that? No, it was more penance than he needed to pay in the exact economy of the first contest between married man and suburban girl.

"My wife's taller than you, blonde," he said. "Wears her hair up behind. Our kid was born in Paris."

"Isn't that marvellous! Doesn't it mean he can never be President?"

"Yes, but we cross that bridge when we come to it. I'm thinking about a constitutional amendment—"

"Was she pretty?"

That *was*! Such elegance! The sly creature had struck hard. That *was* spoke for her acquiescence in the erotic sense which their meetings had for him. Girl of innocence and craft! he thought. Wasn't it true, as one of his friends argued, that any woman is always at least ten years older than every man?

"Yes, Helen is pretty," Gran said.

Having made her point, she did not need to listen. He found her back in Paris. "Born there—the American Hospital, I suppose?"

"No, the Hôpital Foch."

"Ah,"—so pleased. She busied herself sleekly with other words after her triumphal *was*. "Paris, this best garden of the world..."

"Shakespeare, only he said it about France. But Gérard de Nerval—I think it was—said about Paris that she's the paradise

of misery and the capital of hope." Combining and misquoting two writers in thirty seconds, impressing her with his epigram and his memory and his pronunciation of Nerval's name, Gran was impressed himself by his eagerness to delight her, that is, to make himself pleasing. It takes a light and sure foot to gain ground in this slippery contest. Outside the leaded windows with their rich tinting—drinks ran a good twenty cents more in a bar of such chic—the autumn weather was heavy and one Heights bus after another roared home with late shoppers up the hill to the suburb.

"What's Cleveland the capital and the paradise of?" Carol demanded. "White motors and Glidden paints, that's what. I used to think I couldn't bear it another week."

"And you had to bear it all by yourself, Carol?"

"Sh! Stop teasing. Of course, Gran, now I'm growing up, I'm patient to get what I want."

Paying and signalling without saying it that his wife really would expect him now, Granley Hattan asked himself if Carol meant to tell him that he was her patience and what she now wanted. You could never know for sure about this girl. She always refused to meet him on campus; she only once refused their late afternoon meetings at the library. He never said anything except, "See you here tomorrow?"—too proud to come off his age and tell her about his desire, just the desire to see her, to watch her toss the scarf about her throat while he took his pleasure in her high brightness, that subtle and gaudy play of first youth against the elemental needs of love and knowledge and power over others. Was it really any better to come to desire power over things, over self?

Finally it was she who admitted, "Meeting you saved my life, Gran. I don't even fight with Dad anymore. I even forgive him for making me dorm at home and take my B.A. at Reserve."

"I like you, too, Carol."

"You mean something to me, Gran. I really mean it."

He took to carrying his wedding band in his pocket when he met her. Once she caught him slipping it off before touching her hand, and her freshet of laughter poured over him in a fine light shower.

He smiled.

She understood and did not judge him. Growing up to his needs as she felt sure of her own, she even liked him for it. He asked if

she had ever seen the old Slavic settlement down in the Flats near the Cuyahoga River—onion-domed churches and clapboard houses with vines for their age and good places for the usual coffee together.

No, she did not know it. Was it nice? Picturesque? Could it interest even a travelled man like him?

Yes, they would walk there someday, soon, late this week, maybe. Even if he could not walk Paris with her, he could show her the first place where Cleveland was settled, those cobbled and winding streets where every other shop is a shoe-repair and each drugstore an "apteka."

In the meantime, in no hurry for anything, all patience, Gran would talk with her about literature, the world, himself. He had long ago formed the habit of walking at night; past the image of himself as a poet (or as so many poets), his long walks now enabled him to plan his classes in peace and get the regular exercise which preserved his leanness of belly and agility of step. Often Helen was asleep by the time he returned.

Carol Dent met him under a streetlamp three nights later. That it really happened made it almost as good as a novel. Of course, he had spoken of his custom. She laughed and caught his hand. "I've been looking for you over five blocks," she said. "Which way do you usually go?"

"Varies." He took her arm across the street—the long scarf draped over his guiding hand—and did not let her go, because she had added:

"I wanted to talk some more. Forgive me! Am I disturbing you? You know so many things I want to know. Dad doesn't know what to make of me lately, says I'm getting so *cooperative*,"—and a little wry face.

Her frank pleasure flattered him, yet made him uneasy. If she worried about how he felt about her—if she saw him at all—wouldn't she need to be more cautious, reserved? Wasn't that the economy of the suburban girls? The investment of stay-away-closer, the capital gain of come-to-get-me-for-I-do-not-care? She dared to care; she dared to admit it. So sure of herself, she saw no risks at all. Dangerous, dangerous. How did she manage?

What if he were to show impatience with her? He knew she was a child: she knew he knew. Very dangerous.

Gran Hattan was confused by so much irregular honesty in a

lovely and pretentious child. She had no investment, it seemed; she liked being with him; that was all. What was the status of his own increasing investment in her? Where then was his protection?

But these doubts were not scruples and scruples would be a poor shield against the pure delight of her presence. He could not turn away from this sweet brashness. It was a lucky prize; luck is part of the well-planned life. Even her bracelets made a soft jingling in the warm after-rain autumn evening. He would give her a little silver bracelet. Why not give freely? It was time to let down the guards.

This time, admitting nothing but easy companionship through wet autumn leaves, under wet autumn branches, while they touched and jumped away in the hazards of walking at night down a dark suburban street, the skittish brush of arm and arm, shoulder and shoulder, leg and sometimes leg under raincoat, served their long silences most garrulously. In full flood of desire, Gran labored against the tormented tenderness of his overwise blood. Electric it was! Her scheming innocence a blessing! They pulled away. They both liked scenery.

4

The day they walked in the Flats, far from the University and far from the suburb, he took the role of guide ("St. Aloysius it's for. Quite Byzantine, isn't it? Those towers like tumors, aren't they?") and shut up finally when she did not answer and then abruptly, without pretending anything at all, he put his arm hard around her waist and let his fingers spread and luxuriate. They did not break step. It was a harsh dry day of early winter, the sun flashing over slate roofs and hot icy blue through the blue air over the industrial valley just below them. Thin streams of crystalline smoke arose straight into the sky. For answer to him, she let her body's rhythm speak, hard-soft and soft-hard, her hip moving against his, her cropped head leaning for a moment against his shoulder. No, no, at the moment he seized her like that, her hand fluttered against the small of his back, then fell.

They walked in silence, looking for a place.

The thought of his wife came to Gran Hattan only with relish. Helen would not wonder why he was late. He had managed well. She was off with their one docile child to pay a visit to the wife of the Chairman of the department (three pampered children and a

fourth on the way). Nevertheless, something about the sunny winter day and the abrasive midcity air put him out of time again as they walked and looked, and his breathing, frozen and excited, was almost a retrospective pleasure—a pain of desire, a dry pang of memory. The frank taking of Carol's hand had been a similar shock. How could a married man of thirty go so silly over the knuckles of a college senior? Did his boredom with Helen and his job require exactly this revenge—a warm small submitting hand that squeezed and then lay at rest? Yes, it was a pleasure to admit it, his grand discontents of Cleveland could be assuaged by a child who wanted to know all about Paris. He had talked to her, then, about how Hart Crane was influenced by the Symbolists and when he first came to Cleveland he had looked up Crane's friends, an old man in a bookstore, a retired high school teacher, a fairy cook—

She did not blink of course.

"A fairy cook who went to Akron with him. They even wrote a poem together. Now this guy is a fat bald old codger in a businessman's restaurant on Prospect Avenue—wears perfume even in the kitchen. . . ."

"Will you read Hart Crane to me?" she had asked. "I know it's not done anymore, but I bet you read beautifully."

Permit me voyage, love, into your hands. . . He had let go of her hand because he was confused. Even then he had rehearsed his vengeful fantasies. Helen had it coming! No right to worry, fret, take it out on spoiling the kid! He was still a young man. Exactly ten years older than Carol. At her twenty-five he would be the same man—thirty-five. At thirty, forty—caught up and identical. Every woman always ten years ahead of any man? They know what they want.

He would take her back to Paris (back, Rodin's bellying Balzac at the Carrefour Vavin!), get a fellowship, settle the couple of thousand he had on his wife and the boy. He had a novel in him, too, why not? What about all the great men who deserted their wives, and sometimes with the kids in double bunks? (But what about their one son? And what if the novel were no good? And with her parents or somewhere in a too-small-flat—that Helen who had taken the *prix fixe* with him on the Rue Hautefeuille when she wore her hair long and clipped behind until the sixth month of pregnancy and then had it cut for three hundred francs. What about it? Well, Helen was a great one for neatness.)

All the time he had been thinking these thoughts, just from taking

and relinquishing Carol's hand, they had been walking; and now a few days past his memory they were walking again, this time his arm tight around her and the same thoughts; and now he had made a small progress, a triumph of the neatness required, a jolliness of relief just because Helen was safe and busy with Mrs. Professor Chairman Durand until the kid's bedtime.

The sun was white, descending. Then, at the horizon above the factories, it performed for them: suddenly a winter rose and the dry clouds set afire! Away with Helen, a citation for Carol: *Let us walk through time with equal pride*. . . Harold Hart Crane of Crane Chocolates was a local boy, too, although it's more complicated when a poet likes girls.

"Gran?" They had found their way around the steel-gray Russian Orthodox church, back behind the winter-closed pikes of the garden, in the wind-shuttered shadow of the turrets and domes, here just above the industrial valley and the rubbled river and just below the ramps of commercial Cleveland's great bridges, the sun lacking warmth in December but lovely, lovely—"Gran? Gran?"

Now he kissed her; now they met and made vain walking steps against each other; hot and busy-fleshed, they moved under their coats. They played out of time deep within the body's deep hungers.

Jeez, we were necking each other standing up like kids, he remembered later.

5

Driving primly back to the proper Heights, they watched the road. A signal turned green, but a stalled car blocked them. Carol looked out the window, remarking, "Last days for Christmas shopping already. It wasn't even Thanksgiving when you met me."

"You met me, too. Does it seem so long that you have to remark about it? A month almost."

"What are you so chilly about all of a sudden?"

"Nothing, Carol, I'm sorry. I'm crowded. This kind of driving makes me irritable."

She waited while he honked and they were moving in the thick passage again, then said: "Gran, would you like to see me some evening?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I don't know how I can."

This small creature, hot and crafty and surely untouched, had it all figured out. "Tell your wife you have a meeting, papers to grade, late work in the library." She wrinkled her nose and shrugged. "You're doing an essay on Hart Crane and the Symbolists for the Romance Languages Quarterly. Figure it out. Do I really have to tell you how, Gran?"

Could there be another girl like her?—this cool brashness, this hot certainty, this virginal purity of intention in a girl who had bit his lower lip unnecessarily, a too-hard, over-ambitious, biting first kiss for him, just because she had studied up by reading Van der Velde or other deep thinkers on how to win lovers to be crazy about a person and influence their passion. Although she probably planned all day to give him a broken lower lip as a souvenir, he liked and licked it and took the salty taste with pleasure. A cold-sore or bumped it, he would tell Helen.

"Where?" she asked, still counting the Christmas shoppers.

It was flattering and yet disquieting to be so obviously nominated and so quickly used. How young she was! Their evening walks and their bar and their visit to the Flats had no resonance of the past for her—how could they? They were pure potentiality, a thrust into the future; the first time for new love may be eager and happy, but it is dominated by the desire to move on. Innocent buds of teeth experienced in biting! What for Carol Dent was the first deep waking—as much as she could yet awaken—was for Granley Hattan an aching reminder of the long early play of love in many towns. Satisfactions recalled, dissatisfactions recalled complacently, what difference? Carol, however, admitted no memory at all.

"Where?" she insisted.

He thought he knew a place, yes.

"When?"

He told her that he could figure that one out, too.

"Is your wife the suspicious type?"

A role-player himself, Gran felt tolerant of this quick bright red-scarved creature's playing her wickedness with such sweet, keen, and joyous directness. He suggested that she need not bother herself with worries about his wife, who used to be an artist herself, sort of, and did some very good painting for a student and did not ever nag or bother him like many wives.

"Helen was that?" Carol asked, using the first name deliberately, her bright gaze winking toward him, fingerpads touching at the

eyes with their new fawn-lines in black pencil at the corners.

6

Jitters, itchings, headaches, dizziness, faintness, all these boyish pimples and twitters had reawakened in Gran Hattan. Dark jealousies, light-headedness, angers and switchings of his voice mid-sentence, midword—Hattan's unexpected yea-saying to another for what he had set in motion himself, for pure self-love, brought a pitching fleck of terror to his eye when he looked at her. Carol turned up her lips for smiling and lowered her eyes.

Had he really begun this himself? Was will and self-willing ever enough? Would not the will to love overthrow even irony? He woke once strangling with excitement at the thought, *Today, today*. . . And it only meant that they had set an hour to stroll in the garden behind the old monkey-house in Rockefeller Park. If the adventure could no longer end with ennui or any other French word, how could it ever be ended?

Was it possible at last that *this* was love?

All his dreading body asked a no, no, no, and the hurt of it did not grant him retreat. Pleasure is awful. Sweetness is dangerous, the bittersweet most threatening. He had forgotten what a girl is! Complication, trouble, divided gaze, and washing with strong soap to be sure his wife did not sniff out Carol's scent on his shoulders and hands—poor Helen.

It would help to arrange a sharp quarrel with Helen and lump all his discontentments in one ripe justificatory gesture. Funny, although he had planned for it, that the quarrel was unexpected when it came. As always, their neat little, clean little, precious little suburban flat exasperated him. Leaving the murmurous early evening of winter for the cold gleam of all those modern lamps—cones on pulleys, aluminum reflectors, three-way bulbs in many cute disguises—he felt like another bleached modern gimcrack among the foam-rubber furniture, the driftwood pinned against a fireplace blocked with red plywood, the Lautrec affiche (not Dufy at least!) and the *original* Matisse etching, drawn by the Hand itself (one of twenty-four in the series, then the zinc destroyed)—extravagant anniversary gifts from his loving wife, yrs., Helen.

She had moved her own paintings into the hall, first, and finally into the attic. He had not noticed until weeks later, but who looks at the frames in a hall? She had given him that large mouth of pain for days until he noticed, refusing to tell him the matter,

and then refusing even to let him move the paintings back down (she had studied with Hans Hofmann and at the Leger school in Paris).

On the dark afternoons of late classes, Bud customarily stayed up to have dinner with him. Arriving home tired, Gran found Helen frowning and hot, the house over-heated, the boy in bed with a mound of toys heaped about him.

"What's up?"

"There's a measles epidemic going around. I think he's getting it."

"Any spots?"

"No."

"Does he have a fever?"

"Not yet."

"Then what's the matter?"

"I don't know, he's been so irritable. I wanted to get him off his feet. Spock says the complications—"

"Daddy! Daddy!" the excited voice piped thinly. "Mommy says I'm sick! I had softboiled eggs! Come and play with me."

Without saying anything more to Helen, Gran put the thermostat back at 70 degrees, peeled off his clothes to the T-shirt, splashed cold water on his face and neck—the windows were all in steam, the house was a hotbox—and went to sit like a doctor on the edge of Bud's bed. The kid babbled away at him about all the recent exciting events, thermometer inserted so queerly, intensified attentions, consultations by home medical guide and telephone. Gran felt his wrist and forehead. The eyes had a hot sparkle, but they were clear and the pleasure and the grin (My own mouth, Gran thought) were nothing abnormal in an excited child. "I'm sick, Daddy, I'm gonna have quarantine!"

The kid was not sick, no matter how many goddamn measles freckled out in the neighborhood. Gran felt deeply convinced of his diagnosis: too much mothering, overdose of fret and fuss. It would give any child spots of red in the cheek and a suspicion of fever. "Member how I had a cold and drank gingerale, Daddy? That was when it rained all day."

Yes, and July is when Mother is convinced that you have polio, darling.

And fall is the time of burning leaves and an acrid beauty to the industrial skies and Buddy has possible vitamin deficiency, Mother thinks.

And winter is the time of struggling over the thermostat and penicillin for headcolds and one fidget after another.

They waited until the kid finally fell asleep. Helen would deserve what she would get. She could pull her mouth down and let it spread with reluctance to answer him, but this would not stop him. He knew her well! "You're going to make him a hypochondriac! We're raising a goddamn sissy! Wait till he's sick before you jump!"

"*You* don't have to take care of him. You don't care. Measles can affect the eyes—"

"But I tell you he doesn't have it yet."

"You wouldn't care if he did."

"You *want* him to be sick, you want to make him need you more—"

She looked at him full, her tired, pretty, thirty-year-old face flaming: "Maybe you're right! I read those books, too, before I became a housewife. Dust, clean, cook, but don't touch your papers! What an existence! Maybe I need a husband in addition to a son—"

"*You* need? What about me?"

"Oh, what's the use, Gran? You'll never learn."

Of course, when there's learning to be done, it has to begin on both sides, and maybe it was time to admit the fact of Too-Late. You have to exchange needs; you have to have a will for it. Gran admitted (yes, why not?) that he had withdrawn the will. They defined their rancor to each other hopelessly, helplessly, rehearsing the old lines, with Helen strangely cold and adamant and Gran finally the one to break into tears of rage although, yes, he had predicted, planned, and even desired this quarrel. He was a moral man: the quarrel gave him rights while his rage kept its purity. It was best to hate Helen's tall grace. Young matron! Handsomest wife in the Department! Tea, somebody?

"All right, Gran, I'm sorry, you're sorry, let's go to bed or something. I made your supper . . . I suppose you don't want it now . . ."

It was silly of him to show tears; it was not required, although it added to his rights to himself. He gave himself no added credit, however, because he was thinking of the way Helen used to be (a great walker with him in the market of the rue Mouffetard) and that was fine but probably not so fine (who can remember for sure?) as Carol would be even at her age. And Carol's gaucheries meant nothing because Carol would learn to be smart and better than

Helen and smartness isn't everything—look at Helen! It didn't help her to have a Master's and to have thought seriously of a career in art history or advertising or maybe doing books for children. No, he granted that he deserved very little extra credit for those tears before Helen. Many times he felt worse but did not cry. Nevertheless, the tears produced their pain even in him, and he said what seemed to stand most for that pain: "You're ruining my son."

She turned away, large-mouthed and sick, shoulders drooping, the housedress damp under the arms. "My son, your son, *our* son. Oh, never mind, Gran. Stop it now. You'll wake the kid. I'm sorry you feel bad. Please, I'm sorry we're not good to each other anymore. Would you like something to eat?"

No matter, no matter. He had put down his deposit; she would pay. He went about switching off the lamps because the light hurt his smarting eyes, and then submitted to supper while Helen, her hands folded in her lap, sat silently watching him try to eat.

7

The obliging hotel near University Circle had a chic dark bar for first and an opulent stillness for later, mirrors with black hangings in festive mourning, music discreetly from nowhere. Gran assured Carol, only because she asked, that he had arranged things. Things had been arranged by him in the most fantastically simple way: he told Helen that he was going out and would be out late. They were numb to each other. Maybe she simply took it as an extension of his walking habit. No matter for Helen now.

Carol met him in the bar, dressed-up in dancing clothes and her subdued excitement signalling to him in every rich movement—older, yes, womanly, walking toward him now, possessed and possessing by the slip of hips, that great eternal female clamor! She seemed to have revised even her inner self-portrait: from sweet gamine with scarf to sleek lady with pumps and hat. Courtly, calm, Gran rose to greet her, biding his pang of regret for the red sneakers and the scarf and the velvet slacks of their first meeting, and the volume of Verlaine with every line pencilled into English, plus critical notes in the margin:

Et on donne a Lui

And one gives to Him (Capitalized, must be God???)

But of course, like any vital creature, she could not spend her brightest flashing in the reading of French poetry. And she could

not display in a hotel bar the pert, small-wristed, small-footed, dancing-after-life gaiety which was uniquely hers and could perhaps be his. She looked at his finger with a turned-up smile. The ring was in his pocket. Please don't do your Vivien Leigh cheek at me, he wished to her. I want you just to be Carol tonight, the girl I met.

"Please," he said aloud.

"Please what?"

"Please stop smiling and say something."

"Isn't that up to you, Gran?" And in a low voice for her new clothes, hat, and heels: "I'm happy, that's all. I'm glad to be here." Better.

"You know, Carol, I was afraid maybe you couldn't come."

"I said I would, didn't I?" She pouted and pulled her hand away. "Never *couldn't*—I just decided, that's all. Never a question of couldn't with me."

"You're beautiful. You're prettier than Vivien Leigh."

Or was it Audrey Hepburn that she was supposed to be prettier than? No, stop that.

"Smell me, I wore the Lanvin you gave me—"

"Later, Carol." And he was thinking, not of her perfume, but of the tricks and straps of a dressed-up woman, so much loveliness in so much machinery, the flesh breathing, slippery, scented warmly deep within the frills and the lace and the elastic.

"Mind wandering? Penny? You like me in a hat?" She glanced at the card on the table: TRY OUR MANHATTANS. THEY'RE MADE BY THEODORE. "I want one," she said. "I got all dressed up so they'll serve me and not—"

She blushed. They had the drink. Then they strolled to the elevator together and rose to the top floor.

Sometimes things are as they should be! Carol was very happy, showered, fragrant, pleased. Therefore Gran was happy. She learned with athletic ease and delight. Therefore Gran was content. She frisked and played and was loving in a way which seemed almost abstract in its lack of complication—perhaps only because new, perhaps only because mystified at the miracle of flesh within her rigorous embracing of novelty. Blessed by the hot immediacy of her small, pointy, unused, and eager body, Gran nevertheless wondered at this abstraction.

Well, therefore something left to explore, he decided later, drowsy and pleased and thinking: Painless? So simple? Well, surely some deeper reticence. Therefore lovely, therefore fine in health, therefore—*O Carol!* He put his lips near her cheek on the pillow.

“Gran?”

She would not let him dream of her even now stretched cooling at his side. She propped herself on one elbow. “Gran, I have to tell you something.”

“What?”

“Listen, there’s big news in my life, Gran.”

He was shocked full awake at once, and with a watchful irony. “There is?”

“I’m going to Europe! That’s it. I saved it to tell you now. I knew you’d be so happy for me. Paris! It’s my graduation present.”

“If you want to talk,” he replied dryly, “then let’s get up.”

The moment of silent modesty while she bent and unfolded her things (he had not noticed how carefully she had thought to fold) and then dressed, this odd shy empty moment was over before she had finished straightening the seam in her stockings. “Gran, I’m so excited,” she said. “I’ve been wanting to tell you for days, but I thought I’d save it for—” And incredibly, at *this* moment she flushed. “—Saved it for now,” she said. Was it a blush because she had kept a secret from him? “Oh I’ll miss you so,” she added, wriggling her toes into the shoes and turning her foot to look at the heel.

“That’s all right, Carol, I can give you some addresses.”

“Would you? Darling! Some good cheap restaurants? Some friends?”

He sat at the desk and took a sheet of hotel stationery and could not write. His hand was shaking. She watched him with a fixed, self-regarding smile, the eager complacency of the dedicated art and artist collector. He was part of the preparation for the voyage. Typhoid injections, smallpox, triple tetanus, and this. A hotel room for practice.

“Of course, the left bank has probably—the *rive gauche*—changed since your day.”

“Practically nothing but a memory,” he said. “That happened in history when Gide was still alive. 1950. You were at Shaker High.”

Her desire to talk was unquenchable. She had guarded her secret for him, well, this was a tribute of a sort. She applied her lipstick before the closet mirror. "You're teasing, I know! I was a senior then. And you of all people *know* I'm not a baby anymore,"—and then came to slip beside him on the short bench before the desk. They faced each other in the glass over a hotel print, "Hunters in the Snow near Erie," and spoke into their doubled, dusty images—this bright slim creature, this rumpled and tired young man:

"I wanted to tell you all now, Gran. Surprised? Daddy's giving me the trip for my marks in French, thanks to you, kind sir!"

He had drilled her privately on her irregular verbs, was that it?

"You're such an *incentive*, an *example*, Gran darling. Don't be sad. I'll write to you. If I were a man I would want to be just like you, so tall and lean and sensitive. I'll never forget you for ages and ages."

Is this the note of admiration to strike as one rises from bed beside that incentive?

"Of course, I do have advantages as a girl. I suppose I'll meet somebody and get married in Paris—a young poet maybe, who knows? Do you think I'm pretty enough? Do you think it's silly to think so far in the future? Did you meet Helen in Paris?"

"Yes."

"Do you think I'm pretty enough?"

"Ravishing," he said. "No, I guess everyone thinks ahead. You're ravishing, plus cute as a button."

Pouting, she mittened at his hand and peered into his face in the glass. "That started out like such a compliment, Gran, that ravishing. But I don't *want* to be cute as a button. Isn't that a cliché? Mom was cute as a button, and cute as a button only married a lawyer."

"Don't worry, you'll be a success in Paris." Gran was beginning to be pleased with himself. He was amused now, in another way from the way he had thought to be amused, that was true; but pleased and amused all the same by this busy Carol. He felt wide-awake and somewhat drunk, as if it were the last quick walk home in the snow after a late party. She's not a monster, he thought, she's only the new bright suburban girl thrilled by her adventure. She'll come back from Paris and marry an editor, or maybe be one, and pluck out the clichés for pay. She loves life and art, that's all. It

only seems monstrous. "Carol, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'll give you some people to look up. Some great friends."

She was really ready with pencil and notebook from her purse, the same notebook which she had used in the library to copy from *The Last Time I Saw Paris*. This was too good! She had brought the notebook with her! With deliberate hesitation in response to her impatience (afraid he'd change his mind? an attack of prudence about gossip somehow finding its way from the Fourteenth Arrondissement to Cleveland Heights, Postal Zone 6?), he wrote from memory, *Philippe . . . Michel . . . Stanley . . .*

She watched, her lips spelling with him. Then: "Who's he? Who's he?" She listened, and at last she let go the words which put his despair upon him, gave him what he knew he deserved (but afterwards aren't all animals sad?) and must finally have brought the weather change to his face in a way which communicated itself even to her:

"Philippe who? Stanley who? What does he do? They were all your friends back in 1950? You don't think they're too old now, do you?" She clapped her small hand to her mouth. She turned from the glass and twisted to him on the bench. "Oh! Gran, how can you *look* like that? Don't *take* an innocent question like that. I didn't mean that about you, old. I just meant they're probably busy, attached, married and settled already, *you* know. Don't take it like that, Gran. Don't you *stare*. They will probably all be just *marvellous* contacts."

He remembered his responsibility and stopped staring. When he finished the little list of contacts, he had satisfied her. The bar was closed already, so they could not have another drink. She linked her arm in his and told him not to be like ice. He drove her home carefully over the January slick. He had been generous with all he could give.

Then he went back to see if his son's irritability meant that he finally was coming down with something. There were infections in the neighborhood, but the resistance had to be low first for a fever to take hold.

No, he decided at his own door, there was another precious gift which Carol had taken from him. His responsibility to her and to this gift for her had gotten him over the moment near tears when he had so stared and stared. There is that matter of nostalgia for the past which, more and more, the hard and arty person will come to need.

HUBERT CREEKMORE

Tibullus: Elegy II, 4¹

I see enslavement to a mistress closing on me:
Goodbye now, former freedom of my fathers!
My fate is bondage—dismal, too. I'm kept in chains,
And Cupid never loosens the fetters on this woeful victim,
And whether I'm to blame or not, he burns me.
Help! I'm burning up!
Cruel girl, take his torch away.

If I could just not feel such anguish,
How much I'd rather be a stone on frosty peaks,
Or a crag exposed to violent winds,
pounded by shipwrecking waves of abysmal seas!
Now day is bitter and shades of night more bitter still,
for every moment brims with tearful gall.
No use my elegies, nor Apollo, father of song:
Her cupped hand reaches always to solicit cash.

Leave me, Muses, if you can't help a lover.
I give you worship not so I may write an epic,
or picture the path of the Sun
And how the Moon when her orbit is run,
with horses turned, drives back.
Through poems I seek a ready sweet access to my mistress.
Go from me, Muses, if poems have no such power.

And yet I must get my hands on some gifts,
by crime, by murder,
Lest I lie in tears before a locked-up house—
Or must steal the hallowed emblems from holy temples.
But first of all I must profane Venus:
She provokes the crime by giving me a greedy mistress;

¹This elegy is the second of four dealing with the girl called Nemesis in Tibullus' Book II. There is a certain fitness in his choice of this pseudonym for the girl he meant to be his means of "getting even" with his former mistress, Delia. For Nemesis was the goddess of justice and retribution who punished pride and arrogance. However, the poet's instrument of retribution was ironically arrogance itself, and a courtesan interested in nothing but money and gifts.

Then let her suffer my sacrilegious hands.
A plague on anyone who mines green emeralds
 and dyes white fleece with Tyrian purple.
They breed up spurs to greed in girls,
As gowns of Cos do too, and lustrous pearls from sun-red seas.
All these corrupt them; for these, the door endures a key
 and a dog begins to guard the threshold.
But bring a wad of money and chaperones are won,
 locks don't hold and even the dog is silent.
What prize some god, in giving beauty to a greedy girl,
Bestowed upon a bundle of wickedness!
Because of this, sobs and bickerings bellow.
In short, this shows why Cupid now wanders about,
 ill spoken of.

But you who slam the door on lovers outbidden by cash—
May blasts and blazes snatch the profits you cherish.
Still worse, may young men watch the fire with glee
And not one move a hand to pour water on the flames.
And when death pounces on you, be there not a soul
To mourn or offer tributes at your gloomy funeral.
But she who was kind, who was not greedy,
 though she live a hundred years,
Shall have friends to weep at the burning pyre.
And some old man, in homage to his love of long ago,
Will place a wreath on her seemly tomb each year
And, as he leaves, will murmur:
 "Sleep well, sleep in peace;
And earth lie gently on your bones now free from care."

There's truth in what I urge, but how can truth help me?
I must pursue my darling according to her terms.
In fact, if she tells me to sell my ancestral home—
Well, go, household gods, at auction and public sale!
Whatever philtres Circe and Medea listed,
 whatever herbs in magic Thessaly grow,
Along with hippomanes that drip from loins of mares in heat
 when Venus piques wild herds to rut—
All these my Nemesis may brew with countless other simples
And if she'll turn on me a gentle gaze,
 I'll drink them all.

MARVIN MUDRICK

Chaucer's Nightingales

SWEENEY'S NIGHTINGALES which

*. . . sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud,
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud . . .*

can prove their independent animal nature only by performing, at a tragic crisis of the human spirit, the least dignifiable of animal acts: so Mr. Eliot succeeds, by this suavely sonorous shock of juxtaposition, in reclaiming for poets what for Chaucer is as natural as seeing:

*A nyghtyngale, upon a cedir grene,
Under the chambre wal ther as she lay,
Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,
Peraunter, in his briddes wise, a lay
Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay.*

Chaucer's nightingale happens to be decoratively placed, assisting with its song in Criseyde's first reverie of love; but it is a bird to begin with and by no means merely decorative, it sings (we may matter-of-factly suppose: "Peraunter, in his briddes wise") for itself or for a prospective mate, it is true to its own nature and indifferent to man, it can never be absorbed by an anthropocentrism that obsequiously elevates animal nature in order to demean the human—

*Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert . . .*

or grants it a sardonic equality—

*The coxcomb bird, so talkative and grave,
That from his cage cries Cuckold, Whore, and Knave,
Tho' many a passenger he rightly call,
You hold him no philosopher at all . . .*

or dissolves it into a nostalgic symbol of the humanly unachievable

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!

or regards it as another emblem and incarnation of man's idea of indivisible deity—

*I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon. . .*

or even limits it to a lover's serviceable ornament—

*Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierc'd the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree:
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.*

These are all of them ways of dealing with the enigma of animal nature (and of the non-human generally). Chaucer's way, which may be more simply denoted a way of *seeing*, is not, then, the only way; but at least it differs, and deserves special scrutiny.

Chaucer is likely to start with discrimination and outline, with what can be detached and observed. Criseyde's nightingale, for example, is one of a distinct and specifiable kind, like the singing birds in the spring scene that opens the *Canterbury Tales*:

*And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages) . . .*

—three lines of description that set apart the kind, note its habits and impulses, and establish its remoteness from the purposes of man, while the weightless fluidity of the first line affirms without taking into custody the beauty (free, alien, uncoerced) of bird-song.

Not that a bird is ever merely a bird: like Mr. Eliot's nightingales, Chaucer's birds may have a history and a symbolic value, as when Criseyde, falling asleep to the song of the nightingale, dreams

*How that an egle, feathered whit as bon,
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,
And out hire brest he rente, and that anon,
And dide his herte into hire brest to gon,
Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte;
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.*

The Promethean eagle of course symbolizes, in Criseyde's dream,

her complex attitude toward the impending aggressions of love, but what sharpens and steadies this symbolism is the poet's attention to the identity of the bird itself: the lordliness—*darkened* by the disquieting simile "whit as bon"—inherent (and unembellished except by the one simile) in its very name and appearance; its own characteristic abrupt predatory violence as Criseyde's dread and anticipation direct it. The eagle is an eagle still, drawn out of its natural setting and the old cruel myth by the force of Criseyde's egoistic passionate anxiety (which protects itself by symbol), but in all that clarity of image reserving its mystery and uncompromised separateness.

Criseyde, borrowing from its public myth the pitiless bird of prey, invents in her need an *ad hoc* private myth, and by the details tells us more about her motives than she herself knows. So myth—the ready-made variety too—may serve the character as a screen against his anxieties and the reader as an index to them. On a spring morning the myth of Philomela and Procne invades Pandarus's dream to protect him, while he prepares to launch his energy on Troilus's business of love, with the generalization that love—not only for himself—is cruel and ruinous:

. . . Pandarus, for al his wise speche,
Felt ek his part of loves shotes keene,
That, koude he never so wel of lovyng preche,
It made his hewe a-day ful ofte greene.
So shop it that hym fil that day a teene
In love, for which in wo to bedde he wente,
And made, er it was day, ful many a wente.

The swalowe Proigne, with a sorowful lay,
When morwen com, gan make hire waymentynge,
Whi she forshapen was; and ever lay
Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,
Til she so neigh hym made hire cheterynge
How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,
That with the noyse of hire he gan awake,

And gan to calle, and dresse hym up to ryse,
Remembryng hym his erand was to doone
From Troilus, and ek his grete emprise . . .

Man universalizes the human and domesticates the non-human: so that even a bird may be the victim of a tragic passion. In the

myth, as Pandarus's dream recalls it, Procne is metamorphosed in consequence of a terrible disloyalty and failure of passion. The myth is necessary to Pandarus. In the moment of his own despair, when this newly self-appointed manager of lovers and pledged betrayer of a blood-relative is faced by the solitary shape of failure (the recognized true image of himself), he might, if there were no such myth, have to invent one; for the myth allows Pandarus to escape, from his private failure and his abandonment of honor, into familiarly desperate emotions to whose persons and circumstances he is committed only by the illusion of universal sympathy.

Criseyde, while she is accompanied in her first freely amorous imaginings by the voice of the nightingale, needs no escape or protection, she is only *lulled*: her particular bird, singing with its customary loveliness impervious to human crises, comes to her not out of the myth it shares with its sister the swallow (where, in a less comfortable mood of Criseyde's, it might belong) but out of the deferential orchestra that nature provides for lovers. Pandarus's bird is a different sort of accompanist. Since Pandarus—the resourceful but luckless lover, the presumptive guardian in an embattled city of his otherwise friendless niece—comes fresh from promising with brisk daylight confidence to win his niece to the uses of his unresourceful passionate friend, he has good reason to languish, in wakeful night, for want of the sympathy and aid he offers others and to seek the protection of myth and self-forgetfulness. The eventual half-sleep into which he drifts after many a turn in bed (as the poet reports with unsentimental precision) is troubled, then, not by the savage family-myth which the swallow's song evokes and from which it at length disengages itself, but by the lonely recognition of his own failure and of his looming treachery to Criseyde which, in a dream, the universal poignance of the myth dims somewhat and makes more endurable. When “hire cheter-yng,” too close to be taken for anything but the “noyse” of a bird, dissipates the myth's grandiose pattern (and Pandarus's personal incubus) of betrayal and doom, the swallow withdraws—only a bird—into the featureless background of Pandarus's morning; and Pandarus, his shattered self remagnetized into the legwork-and-strategem persona by which he holds off the waking world, resumes his name and business. The briskly colloquial diction—interrupted only during Procne's lament—slips back into place as if

nothing has happened. The nightingale and the swallow, cut off from Criseyde's yearning and from Pandarus's premonition of ruin and dishonor, go on singing somewhere nevertheless, intact and unheard.

To demonstrate that animal nature is at many points indifferent and inaccessible to man is not to ignore, but rather to lead us toward identifying more precisely, its areas of contact with human nature. When Troilus, ramping in complacent unattached maleness before the lovelorn knights and squires of his company, is suddenly struck down by love, Chaucer's comment takes the form of a condensed beast-fable:

*As proude Bayard gynneth for to skippe
Out of the weye, so pryketh hym his corn,
Til he a lasshe have of the longe whippe;
Than thynketh he, "Though I prauunce al byforn
First in the trays, ful fat and newe shorn,
Yet am I but an hors, and horses lawe
I moot endure, and with my feres drawe"*

The fable is apt not merely because Bayard (the knightly horse), "feeling his oats" too, behaves very much as Troilus does and so serves the ironist's purpose of diminishing Troilus to his animal aspect, nor because here Troilus's awakened appetite is in fact far more "animal" than Bayard's urge "to skippe/Out of the weye," but, perhaps chiefly, because in the comic balance between Bayard as Troilus and Bayard as horse the passing resemblance between man and animal becomes their irrepressible common fate: to keep imagining (though not all animals are so articulate as Bayard) freedom where there is none, or very little ("Yet am I but an hors"); to act incorrigibly as if the energetic and the beautiful ("ful fat and newe shorn") are curbless and exempt from any law (but "horses lawe/I moot endure, and with my feres drawe"). Chaucer's respect for distinctions is also a respect for significant likenesses.

Criseyde, too, has her time of identification with the mystery of impulse and of animal nature. Having recalled to us Criseyde's dream of the rending eagle by this image—as she yields at last to Troilus—of another resistless predatory bird:

*What myghte or may the sely larke seye,
Whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?*

Chaucer shows us now another view of the bird whose music

casually presided over Criseyde's earliest acceptance of the possibility of love:

*And as the neue abaysed nyghtyngale,
That styneth first when she bygynneth to synge,
Whan that she hereth any herde tale,
Or in the hegges any wyght stiryng,
And after siker doth hire vois out rynge,
Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,
Opned hire herte, and tolde hym hire entente.*

From her briefly revived fear of surrender and outrage (like the lark's "fear" of the sparrowhawk), so that

*Right as an aspes leef she gan to quake,
Whan she hym felte hire in his arms folde . . .*

Criseyde moves into the diminished placid reassuring world of a country night: the timid nightingale, pointlessly "abashed" by the harmless usual sounds of the night but recovering its confidence to sing out, is in this aspect and at this moment Criseyde herself, throwing off at last her fear of love and opening her heart to her lover. If this imagery is more than shimmering and Shelleyan, it is because we have learned, during the preceding four thousand lines of the poem, just how different Criseyde has always been—in the prudence, calculatedness, sophistication, vanity, cynicism, and appealing naiveté of her temperament—from any ascertainable animal nature, and by just how distressful, tortuous, steady, and Pandarus-plotted a route she has arrived at a moment when she recedes from all she is in order to become, for the moment, another sister of the nightingale and the instinctive simple celebrant of love.

In the tenderness and immediate pathos of this comparison (as everywhere else), Chaucer will not blur an outline, sacrifice anything marginal or past to the reader's vicarious absorption in the human center and present of the poem. The reader, like Criseyde, is not catapulted into an exaltation, he arrives at it; and what does the guiding is Chaucer's concern with the history as well as the local commotion of things, his acceptance of irreducible plurality, his acknowledgment of separate orders of existence each of them at some points contiguous and analogous to the others but each reserving an uninvadable self-sufficiency, his respect for a diversity of appearances: that perpetual grace of judgment which will not take

a likeness or one aspect for the thing itself, or ignore the final isolation—even from its most reasonable linkages with the non-human world—of the human spirit.

There is ultimately a pathos beyond the reach of metaphor, a pathos attainable only when the human spirit has penetrated and lost all illusion of support outside itself, even the support of metaphor. Lear, exhausted after a lifetime of imperial rhetoric, says to his daughter:

*I know you do not love me, for your sisters
Have (as I do remember) done me wrong.
You have some cause, they have not*

and Cordelia replies, “No cause, no cause.” This earned simplicity of pathos is very rare in Shakespeare: his heroes and heroines live and die, characteristically, within Lear’s lost illusion regarding the magical powers of rhetoric.

In Chaucer’s world, however, whose disparate phenomena rhetoric can set in some order but has no power to alter or commingle, such nakedness of spirit is commoner and more likely. Rhetoric persists, of course (though with characteristic Chaucerian fineness of distinction), as long as there are illusions. At a moment when Troilus glories and can still take comfort in his princeliness and Criseyde’s love, the poet himself suggests that we see Criseyde as, returning from the hunt, Troilus may see her:

*. . . whan that he com ridyng into town,
Ful ofte his lady from hire wyndow down,
As fressh as faukoun comen out of muwe,
Ful redy was hym goodly to saluwe.*

Thus Criseyde appears as the noble and beautiful hunting-bird of her worshipful falconer (while the poet may be implying, in this metaphor which not only identifies an instant of the lovers’ relationship but catches up its history, that Criseyde has been and remains dangerous, possibly inconstant, not quite subduable). On the other hand, the Troilus who has accepted at last the fact of Criseyde’s betrayal is beyond the self-indulgences, however reasonable, of rhetoric:

*“And certeynly, withouten moore speche,
From hennesforth, as ferforth as I may,
Myn owen deth in armes wol I seche.*

*I recche nat how soone be the day!
But trewely, Criseyde, swete may,
Whom I have ay with al my myght yserved,
That ye thus doon, I have it nat deserved."*

Troilus has reached a summit of awareness from which he shares at last with his author a view of the futility, at such levels, of rhetoric. If Troilus's statement seems understatement, it is because the lover has lost his illusions regarding the efficacy, and perhaps the truth, of those partially enlightening lovers' metaphors that may seem, in retrospect, lovers' lies: Criseyde as lark, as nightingale, as falcon, as saint and love-goddess, as almost anything except the intolerably perplexed, timorous, untrustworthy, endearing woman she is.

Lear arrives at his clarity of awareness only through the most terrible wrenchings of spirit and language (as if the poet too must work his way through these). Troilus's ordeal may not be so terrible as Lear's; but Chaucer, scrupulously defining every counter of rhetoric his characters use or are used by, keeps us clear enough of the ordeal to leave it Troilus's only, and to grant to himself and the reader an inviolable and uninterrupted design. What Lear discovers after catastrophe and madness, Chaucer has been continuously instructing us in by an unillusioned examination of image and metaphor from the beginning: that nothing—no power or vanity of language or of temporary human comfort—can save man from the recognition of his own solitude and eventual powerlessness. Tragedy is beyond sulphurous and thought-executing fires, as it is also beyond larks and nightingales.

OLIVIER TODD

Paris Letter

THERE ARE TWO topics about which the French, when pressed hard, are, to put it mildly, diffident: Algeria and Poetry. Interest in the latter subject, for the people who are willing to spend four or five hundred francs on a volume of verse, may not be independent of the former. Many readers buy a book of poems instead of a novel very much in the mood in which they give up their dailies to concentrate on more weeklies. They recoil into poetry. The present trend, which should not be overemphasized, recalls up to a point the poetical boom that took place from 1940 to 1946, taking by surprise public, publishers and poets. For once all were thinking more or less along the same lines. In 1956 readers are more passive. They vaguely feel that they want something different from the hermetic incantations that were lavishly offered after the Liberation. As for publishers, they condescend to examine manuscripts without talking too much about the prices of paper and printing.

With the bigger firms, this phase corresponds to the idea that a couple of *plaquettes* every month may not be bad prestige advertising. After all, in a catalogue, "poetry"—after "novels", "detective stories", "history of ideas" and "philosophy"—is much nicer than "paleontology." Indeed, they feel, a lot of poetry would be ridiculous; a small regular dose displays a healthy and limited curiosity for the niceties of language. In the economics of literature it is significant that Seghers, the firm that has courageously published more poetry than any other—over six hundred volumes by now—is forced to bring out most of them on a subscription basis.

With the appearance of the so-called prodigy Minou Drouet, commercialism seemed to be closer than ever on the heels of the muse. The most unfortunate aspect of this whole *affaire* is that critics have spent far more time in fierce controversies about whether or not it was possible for a child of seven to write such stuff than about the quality of the stuff itself. If they had, they would have been forced to acknowledge that it was very flaccid. It certainly cannot be compared to the works of writers who have attracted attention *without* the help of a well-run public relations department.

Paul Valet, to take one, is in the anarchistic tradition running from Villon to Queneau and Prévert. Valet does not have Prévert's sense of free but always decipherable rhythms nor Queneau's verbal ingenuity, but like them he refuses to indulge in the cryptic. Sometimes his taste for the straightforward drives him into pomposity and even, quite consciously, into brutal vulgarity. He likes to defend himself on that score, as in *Les Poings sur les i* with lines dedicated "A mes amis écoeurés" and entitled "Poésie insupportable."

*Vous espérez encore que plein de politesse
 La sauce relevée pour plaire aux délicats
 Je vous serve du caviar noir aux ribambelles
 Ou du coeur nostalgique orné de fines herbes
 Sur un plateau d'argent sculpté de trémolos
 Mais dans ma gargotte il n'y a aucun drapeau
 Tout est hoquet pour vous qui voulez que ça chante
 Je vous donne à manger du cheval aux fayots
 Tout le reste a coulé en mil neuf cent quarante
 Avec les faisandés et leurs fins horipeaux*

With a more elaborate style, a greater power in handling images, Valet might write as movingly as Robert Desnos—who more than ten years after his death has an ever increasing and well deserved reputation. His poetry, fusing modern techniques and traditional patterns, opened the road to what may be a definite progress in contemporary French literature. His collected poems contain some of the best alexandrines produced in the last thirty years, not a small achievement when one bears in mind the difficulties inherent to that wonderful and natural monster of French prosody. Forty years ago T. S. Eliot said that the *vers-libre* which is good is anything but “free”. Desnos has shown that now traditional verse which is good is anything but traditional.

The lesson has been approved and applied by young poets with very different temperaments. Yves Bonnefoy has found in *Du Mouvement et de l'Immobilité de Douve* a new diction, a superb and sustained elevation of tone that does not recall but proceeds from some attitudes and mannerisms of Valéry. Bonnefoy is at his best in shorter pieces where the density of his syntax gives to every line a wholly satisfying fullness, as for instance in “Vrai nom”:

*Je nommerai désert ce chateau que tu fus,
 Nuit cette voix, absence ton visage,
 Et quand tu tomberas dans la terre stérile
 Je nommerai néant l'éclair qui t'a porté.*

*Mourir est un pays que tu aimais. Je viens
 Mais éternellement par tes sombres chemins.
 Je détruis ton désir, ta forme, ta mémoire,
 Je suis ton ennemi qui n'aura de pitié.*

*Je te nommerai guerre et je prendrai
 Sur toi les libertés de la guerre et j'aurai
 Dans mes mains ton visage obscur et traversé.
 Dans mon coeur ce pays qu'illumine l'orage.*

After enjoying several poems of this particular quality one feels that preciousness like puritanism may often have its good points, especially as part of a reaction against flat colloquialisms.

Less abstract and with an equally great experimental respect for form is Jean Joubert's *Les Lignes de la Main*, which was awarded the 1955 Antonin Artaud prize. Joubert writes:

*... je ne parlais pas pour rire
Ayant élu des compagnons
Monotones et minéraux:
Taupe, écharde, grillon, silex;
Elu le reflet de l'orage
Dans l'oeil dévorant des statues.*

*Lampes mortes, mortels dédains,
Plumages gris d'anges douteux:
Au vitrail gelé de la mer
J'ai tracé du doigt des visages
Qui faisaient voeu d'éternité.*

There are signs which indicate that in his future work there will be more "doubtful angels" and fewer "moles". In the treatment of wider themes, humor will reinforce a genuine lyrical gift.

Most valuable young French poets illustrate the quatrain:

*Polyhymnia and Erato
Less powerful but more fair
Now outdance our Clio
But why should Clio care?*

Getting away even if temporarily from the immediate present and the pressure of historical events brings them back to an individualism that narrows their outlook but forces them to face technical problems. Even those who, like Valet, might be called *engagés* reflect in the long run aesthetic preoccupations which cannot be answered by mere good feelings or satirical moral content.

On the border of poetry and prose but concerning both, the first volume of the long awaited Collected Works of Antonin Artaud caused a great deal of trouble between the publishers and the dead writer's family, once more raising the question of the right of a writer's descendants to emasculate his writings. This book points to a revaluation of Artaud that will involve people outside coterie worshippers. The first volume—another four are to follow—displays the extraordinary personality of a man who has given in a classical style some of the best rational analyses of irrational states of mind. The introspective effort that it represents may perhaps be compared to that which must have driven Scott Fitzgerald through the writing of *The Crack-Up*. It is a great pity that these *Oeuvres Complètes*, which will be used by all those who are interested in the history of Surrealism, should not have been prepared more carefully for the press. They contain many pieces that had been thrown to the public at random, such as the *Correspondance avec Jacques Rivière* or the celebrated *Lettre à Monsieur Le Législateur de la Loi sur les Stupéfiants*, as well as some up to now

unpublished matter. Reading this book carefully and tracing the curious connections of Artaud's mind might give those who are strongly prejudiced against Surrealism a new insight into that school of—whatever the disciples said—writing. This volume also proves conclusively that Artaud, like all the great French surrealists—Breton, Aragon, Eluard or Desnos—escaped very quickly from Surrealism. Those who care to go deeper into the subject should certainly read *La Philosophie de Surréalisme* by Ferdinand Alquié, a Sorbonne cartesian who has studied the subject with thoroughness and understanding.

Other signs show that in certain circles interest in poetry is reappearing. Reviews like *Les Lettres* and the excellent *Les Lettres Nouvelles* have brought out special issues devoted to poetry. A new weekly, *Demain*, has a poetic anthology—something which had not been seen for years. What is now badly needed is an objective study of the respective faults of readers and writers in that sphere. It would go some way towards mutual understanding. Poets would not feel, as they do, that they are completely cut off from all classes of readers, and the public may eventually come to see that poetry is not necessarily an idiotic activity. Prospective readers should have a little more patience. And poets a great deal more modesty. Among other things, they should stop trying to pass themselves off as philosophers.

Imaginative prose has not been as promising as poetry in the last few months. Members of the pre-war generation do not contribute to it at all. Judging from Jules Romains' *Le Fils de Jerphanion*, it is just as well. Apart from a few unconvincing tirades on the hygienic advantages of incest there is nothing original or interesting in this novel. It is far worse than any of the twenty-seven volumes of *Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté*. One wonders if writing political editorials several times a week for *l'Aurore* has deprived Romains of his tiresome enough middle-aged talent. How sad that he should have gone vinegarish after *Les Copains* and *Le Docteur Knock*.

François Mauriac at least has kept a great deal of style in writings which are almost exclusively political. Even if one disagrees with him it is a literary pleasure to read his weekly contribution to *L'Express*. If his political papers are ever collected as Camus's were in *Actuelles* or Aragon's in *L'Homme Communiste*, they will certainly be in the forefront of polemics.

This genre is still flourishing in Paris weeklies and monthlies, to our enjoyment and to the tireless and slightly naive astonishment of our English critics, friendly or not. Controversies raged around Pierre Hervé's *La Révolution et les Fétiches*, an analysis of Communist ideology and practise by a Marxist intellectual. This book has been the object of hundreds of strictures, invectives, castigations, panegyrics, eulogies and blessings from all quarters. Sartre, for one, criticized it in a subtle and powerful way. Hervé replied to his most important critics in another book, *Lettre à Sartre et à quelques autres*. Sartre replied to this reply. The game is going on. Many of the discussions around *La Révolution et les Fétiches* have a medieval flavour. There is a touch of St. Jerome about Hervé. St. Jerome wrote to ladies giving them advice on how to preserve virginity. Politics being more

important than sex to-day in France, Hervé, with the passionate feelings of an ex-sinner, tries to persuade people to regain some kind of political purity.

His campaign against the fanaticism and shallowness of our particular brand of Socialist Realists started before de-Stalinization became official. French Communist intellectuals have been very slow in adopting the new anti-Zhdanovism. They seem to be far behind the Italians, for instance. Yet there are a few signs of thawing in their cultural activities. Claude Roy, in his rather Stendhalian novel *A Tort ou à raison*, has tried to see why so many Left-wing Frenchmen are not and cannot be Communists, a state of affairs that anyone can understand but that had rarely been described by Communist novelists in the last ten years. A passage like the following could not have been written before 1955. If it had, the author would certainly have been classified and treated as a low-down petty bourgeois:

Toni Horst était communiste. Laurent pensait à Jean à ses camarades français. A Vienne comme à Paris, ils étaient là, un peu pesants, entêtés, avec leur démarche de montagnards, levés avant le jour, plus fatigués que fatigués. Laurent avait cru un moment qu'il allait se mettre à leur pas. Il s'était essoufflé. Il lui était apparu avec les années qu'il lui était presque impossible de ne pas être communiste et extraordinairement difficile de l'être. Il leur donnait presque toujours raison, et jusque dans leurs torts. Mais il ne se sentait pas assez raisonnable pour avoir raison avec eux, ni assez fort pour avoir quelquefois tort à leurs côtés. Il acquiescait à leur entreprise sans avoir l'énergie d'y participer. C'était se refuser le droit de prétendre corriger leurs maladresses. Ils apportaient des réponses dont son esprit sentait la justesse, et son coeur la justice. Mais juger une demande logique, et la sentir généreuse, n'exige pas qu'on s'y associe. Il faut autre chose, un élan de tout le corps, pour que la vérité, si elle ne se confond pas avec l'intérêt, devienne notre passion.

Beneath the nicely balanced rhetorical sentences and a latent My Party Right or Wrong, there is a definite effort at objectivity. That is also true of Roger Vailland's *325.000 francs*, quite remarkable from the point of view of the narrative through its restrained technique.

The perfect stylistic feast, however, came from other quarters, with General De Gaulle's *Mémoires*—for those who enjoy an occasional dose of Bossuetlike periods—and especially with Albert Camus's *La Chute*. Its rich prose can be relished in the way in which excellent food is appreciated. This goes some way towards excusing its obscure moral intentions. *L'Etranger* and *La Peste* were easy to decipher. This long monologue of Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a French lawyer exiled in Amsterdam, who poses throughout his confessions as a judge and as a penitent, is far more complicated to unravel. Camus explains ideas lyrically or by caricaturing their opposites. His tortuous character wallows in systematic ambiguities with a sentimental cynicism that leaves the reader to fend for himself.

Camus is perhaps the only writer, among those who have appeared since the Liberation, always to have been successful in his creative works as far as form goes. (The only exception is perhaps his play *Le Malentendu*, very far beneath *Caligula*.) This imaginative endurance is unequalled. Many authors in their forties cultivate the worst of their peculiarities. Roger Peyrefitte is a case in point. He has now almost reached the level of those writers whose works are generally found on our railway station platforms. Peyrefitte's *Les Clés de Saint-Pierre*, which is supposed to describe the loves of a young priest caught up in Vatican intrigues, is extremely dull not in spite but because of the amount of research that went into the building up of its atmosphere. A Benedictine friend told me that among the Catholic hierarchy many were amused by the thinly disguised allusions to contemporary personalities. As an unbeliever, I experienced a feeling that I very rarely have: I was simply shocked and disgusted. The whole book is abominably crude and in very bad taste. If the characters were alive in one way or another one might overlook the desire for scandal that is inspiring most of Peyrefitte's work nowadays, but his men and his women, ecclesiastical or not, are mere effigies. *Les Jeunes Proies* is even poorer. It can only delight those who can see no difference between Gide and the publications of certain foreign firms, with headquarters in Paris, that cater for tourists with a weakness for the pornographic. The boys in *Les Jeunes Proies* do not come up to those of *Les Amitiés Particulières*. The Lesbian who converts the story-teller to heterosexuality is embarrassingly absurd. The whole performance is neither serious nor funny nor moving. From a sociological angle it is interesting to note that the semi-literate book-buying public, that is becoming more and more of a problem in France, has avidly swallowed Peyrefitte's last two novels.

Jacques Lanzmann's *Le Rat d'Amérique* is a very interesting work. Lanzmann's first book, *La Glace est rompue*, already showed that one could expect a lot from him. He mixes the real and the imaginary with an astonishing vitality. He started in life as a painter, and from his former trade he has kept a sense of line and colour that brightens all his pages. *Le Rat d'Amérique* was sold as a novel and was one, unlike many other books which are barely short stories—Françoise Sagan's *Un Certain Sourire* for instance. It is better than *Bonjour Tristesse* (that may not be saying much) but it suggests that the author will go on churning out duplicates of her first book for the rest of her writing life. Maurice Druon's *Hotel de Mondez* is also a very slim novella obviously written with an eye on the screen.

If many writers keep the cinema in mind, plenty of film directors go on finding their subjects in novels. The most talked-of adaptation has been René Clément's *Gervaise*, which is disappointingly faithful to Zola's naturalistic *L'Assomoir*. Zola's *tranches de vie* bear filming even less than Balzac's world as Lang, Renoir, Feyder and Carné courageously found out long ago. Two of the best, if not the best, adaptors, Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, worked on *Gervaise*. If they were not able to produce something good, no one will. The main part, that of a persecuted working-

class woman facing a husband, a couple of lovers, alcohol, too much washing, too much rent and a few other problems, is played by Maria Shell. She limps about, overuses her enchanting smile, and gives one the unpleasant impression of a *jeune fille de bonne famille* on a prolonged slumming party. Preoccupied with providing anthology pieces, René Clément has constructed a very loose film.

René Clair's *Les Grandes Manoeuvres*, a humorous description of the amours of a cavalry lieutenant in a provincial garrison at the end of the nineteenth century, has the dexterous efficiency and wholeness that *Gervaise* lacks, though it is far less ambitious. Still, it displays a lack of inspiration that seems to be the disease of most of our great film directors, not excluding Renoir who, with *Eléna et les Hommes*, produced a sort of slow motion mixture of Labiche and Offenbach. Like *Les Grandes Manoeuvres*, it takes place some time near the end of the 19th century and brings in a lot of uniforms. At the level of straightforward entertainment it is less pleasing. In *L'Album de Famille de Jean Renoir*, which was shown with *Eléna*, Renoir explains his new attitude to film directing. He now believes in offering his outline conception of a film to his cast and technicians and then giving them enough freedom to express themselves, from the electricians to the leading actors. This democratic aesthetic may be attractive in theory, but in practice—in *Eléna* at any rate—it results in a total confusion of purposes. Renoir also said good-humoredly that he was more tolerant than he used to be. That is always excellent politically, but artistically it leads to eclecticism, the most nauseating of systems.

Young directors have also failed in their attempts. Alexandre Astruc, with *Les Mauvaises Rencontres*, concocted a work in which everything is false, characters, plot, dialogues and setting. One cannot forgive dozens of scenes such as the one in which, while the heroine says "I was broke, tired and depressed. I decided to go away, to go anywhere", she is shown by a second class carriage (third class still existed when the film was made) at the Gare de Lyon, bound for the Riviera. One would not insist on this aspect of *Les Mauvaises Rencontres*, if some extremely competent and sophisticated French critics had not praised in Astruc's film a psychological realism that is conspicuously absent.

However, the French cinema, encouraged by the public, has found a new medium: long, intelligent documentaries. Up to now, whenever documentaries appeared on the screen, more often than not *The Match Industry in Sweden*, *Sardine Canning in Brittany*, or those wretched *Travelogues* that American companies insist on exporting, the audience yawned collectively. Nowadays, thousands of people eagerly go to a show entirely composed of documentaries. Cousteau's *Le Monde du Silence*, Alain Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard* (which soberly deals with the problem of concentration camps) and Clouzot's *Le Mystère Picasso* were among the most outstanding of this year's productions. The popularity of these films is an unquestionable sign of intellectual health in a great part of the French public and, indirectly, an encouragement to creators—in all fields—who seriously attempt to meet the demands of the age.

VERNON YOUNG

Love, Death, and the “Foreign” Film - 1957

“Man always lives among graves, and we can recognize the future in store for him by the dignity with which he moves among them.”

—Franz Marc

IN A REVIEW of Pierre Braunberger's film, *Bullfight* (*The Nation*, August 4th, 1956), Mr. Robert Hatch, with visible effort keeping diffidence from becoming contempt, implicitly decided that whatever merits the movie had he wasn't interested in appraising them, so shocked was he by the subject and by those for whom that subject (death—in Mr. Hatch's flat view of it) exercised any fascination. His disdain was summarized with this, to me astounding, declaration:

The world is full of incompatibilities—you cannot, for example, feel akin to both *Walden* and the ritualistic slaughter of wild beasts in the hot sun.

In passing, it should be noted how unfairly Mr. Hatch has loaded his brush: “ritualistic slaughter” is calculated to stress the quantitative, negative aspects of the bullfight at the expense of any other meaning to be discovered therein; “wild beasts” cannot accurately be held to define carefully bred and conditioned bulls—and “hot sun” seems to be a puritanical intensive for characterizing the event as disagreeably pagan. Beyond these rhetorical manoeuvres, the statement illustrates a prevailing point of view—embracing subjects other than bullfights or films of them—among those who spell their liberalism with a capital L, and points to the probability that the progressive American of our day is as disingenuous a chauvinist as the world has seen for some time. Of course, there is something incidentally comic about an editor on a Manhattan political weekly asserting sympathy with a rural New England anarchist, whose pantheism, alone, represents the negation of every social value to which *The Nation* is ostensibly dedicated.

I have no long-buried bone to pick with Mr. Hatch. He simply happens to have outlined, with uncommon candor, a generic complacency, and he's brother under the skin, whether he says yea or nay, to the word-acrobat of *Time's* film-review page who, concealed by editorial anonymity, sneers at foreign decadence from a column adjacent to a display advertisement of *Tums*.¹ From our exponent's defense of healthy-mindedness

¹As a complex instance of moral chastisement administered through a *first-the-pleasure, then-the-guilt* pattern, note *Time's* review of *The Wages of Fear*, Feb. 21, 1955 where an attack on Henri-Georges Clouzot was unmitigated by any distinction between the conception, a novelist's (Georges Arnaud), and Clouzot's principal role of director.

it should logically follow that if liberal American values are more life-enhancing than those which underlie the bullfight, for instance, American movies might be expected to profit from them artistically—an inference that requires no lengthy refutation. Our films—the exceptions barely justify the courtesy of a concession—are worse than incompetent and lower than juvenile: they are meretricious where they're not massively vulgar; they serve beauty or use as little as any popular art in the history of mankind. Every shallow Hollywood film is shallow precisely because it travesties an existing cultural shallowness: the tacit belief that it's both desirable and possible to legislate passion and death from the scheme of things, and that social security alone can bring the good life into existence. Every good imported film is not merely technically better, it's in another world of art. It *is* art. Especially when it deals potently and in cinematic terms, as it does often, with those irreconcilables which our population at large is too terrified by to confront: the co-extension of life and death, of attraction and revulsion, love shaped from the shock of death, material sacrifice for the peace of personal dignity.

Needless to say, the Braunberger film does not engage all these universals, but the evident thoroughness with which it explores its subject has been sufficient to stimulate that compulsive counter-reflex, the crux of Mr. Hatch's protest. If one is a forward-looking American, one *shouldn't* enjoy bullfighting, even though it is suggestively comparable (without for the moment estimating its aesthetic value) to every large-scale arena combat known to our democracy—the political campaign, the congressional investigation, the prizefight and the World Series, the radio or T.V. "quiz"—differing in a single major respect: its calculated object is not simply the humiliation but the death of the baited victim.² Man, universally, lives by the death of others, but it's not democratic to acknowledge the murder which roams in the pandemic heart, nor to confess its symbolic sublimation; above all, it is not progressive to relish, or even to appreciate, its ritualistic celebration in another cultural mode.

Bullfight is essentially a sensitive editorial feat, like the other two films produced by Braunberger, *Paris, 1900* and *Life Begins Tomorrow*, a non-fiction movie assembled entirely from existing material (which is to say that nothing was specially photographed for this film), as a graphic means of explaining the principal components of the art of bullfighting, with historical examples, from the training of the matador to the *corrida* itself. I am amazed—or would be if I hadn't encountered this indifference to craftsmanship among sociologists before—that anyone, any critic, let's say, could fail to be enthralled by the film's sustaining details, which include remarkable shots of a bullfight made in 1895(!), a sequence photographed in Peru which has that keyed-up vibration of light as instantly recognizable in kind as the light of our own high-altitude South-

²Curiously, opponents of the bullfight always pity the bull, not the man. When, in their private arenas, they are themselves gored, do they, one wonders, accept the penalty of their complicity in the fatal action?

west, an absolutely fabulous display of style by Conchita Cintron, who fights from horseback in a compact enclosure, and an impressive moment, utterly silent (narration and guitar music otherwise accompany the film) when Manolo Gonzales prays before leaving his dressing-room, while his manager, in the background, smokes with controlled nervousness . . . Personally, I find many aspects of the Spanish psyche incomprehensible, and *Bullfight* did not make an *aficionado* of me. But it did project for me, more vividly than any prose description or verbal proselytizing ever has, the significance of the bullfight's profound attraction; it elucidated, beyond question, how acutely the Spanish have understood—since long before Wagner—the phenomenon of the Love-Death motif.

Bullfight isn't a Spanish film, as I may not have made clear. Braunberger is a Frenchman, and his film is the best recent importation from France; the most popular have been those 'gimmick' entertainments, Jules Dassin's *Rififi* and Clouzot's *Diabolique*, and René Clair's usual champagne-on-shredded-wheat, *The Grand Maneuvers*, so effervescently superficial it is an epitome—while you watch its exquisitely-tinted fun, you're beguiled, yet you can't help wondering why Clair has never, in thirty years, really wanted to say anything. Max Ophuls' *The Earrings of Madame De* . . . is the model by reference to which Clair's 'situation' in this film—love taken seriously too late—is sadly vitiated. Proceeding from deeply serious premises, *The Proud and The Beautiful* and André Cayatte's *We Are All Assassins*, flawed, both of them, in the execution, are none the less noteworthy. The former, a Sartre invention directed by Yves Allegret, places a French couple in a Vera Cruz pest-hole where the husband is instantly killed by yellow fever; the ironic hinge of the ensuing action is the dazed astonishment experienced by the wife (Michele Morgan) in this heat-stinking nightmare, at her own resources for survival, resources which inspirit a broken-down doctor (Gerard Philipe). Two moments are effectively mordant in the French manner: one where the wife, groping on the cockroachy floor under the bed, cries for the first time during the ordeal; the other, where Philipe dances with grotesque abandon in a cantina, as his payment for a bottle of rum. Truthfully, I was convinced less by the abrupt moral rehabilitation of the ending than by the local-color degradation which preceded it . . . André Cayatte's film is one you watch with determination to like it, even as it disintegrates, continuity-wise, as you watch, for it is concerned with our most fundamental social value—justice. Unfortunately, Cayatte has written a peroration, not a scenario. Despite many harrowing episodes—first with the Maquis, then in the cells of Villejuif, the same milieu as that of Bazin's paralyzing novel, *Head Against the Wall*—the film breaks down under a surfeit of exhortations and climaxes. One is finally unpersuaded that we are all assassins; the guilt here seems less that of Man than of the appalling French penal system.

Guilt is also the *bete noir* of German film-makers. *The Last Ten Days*

and *The Devil's General* deal as squarely as at present it is possible to hope for, I suppose, with the Hitlerian sector of the German madness. But they chiefly confirm the German mastery of cinema techniques, of lighting especially, which redeemed their early films when nothing else did. *The Last Ten Days* proves what one had long suspected of the highly-praised director, G. W. Pabst, that his head continually interferes with his artistic sense. Again and again the film falls short of the concentrated horror it climbs to; but the performance of Oskar Werner makes it entirely worth seeing. We have no single film actor with such warmth and such articulated vehemence. Similarly, Curt Jurgens is the dominating presence of the literate (and a shade too literary) adaptation of Carl Zuckmayer's more-or-less biographical play. I fear the film will not gratify those who would have preferred the Nazi obscenity to have been indicted by another standard than that of the officer class, but that's the subject as given, ending with a self-liquidation in Siegfriedian style, untrue to the derived facts but dramatically plausible³. Like the Pabst film, this one is enlarged beyond its scenario by its trenchant depiction of a man realizing too late that he has bartered his soul for an unspeakable political shibboleth. If German producers can find subject matter in which the strain of making public speech is not omnipresent they may well assume a position as eminent as they are falsely supposed to have occupied in the Twenties. However, it will demand a resiliency not native to them to equal the cinematic sophistication of the French, an effort of humanity to rival the Italians at their best, and a supreme control of taste to match the clarity of the Swedish.

The greatest European film to be shown here in the past year—always excepting *La Strada*—is *The Naked Night*, directed by the virtually unknown Ingmar Bergman who, at the age of 35, has a dozen (I believe) film credits to his name (as scenarist or director or both) and whose script for Alf Sjöberg's *Hets* (*Torment*), 1944, put the Swedish movie on the international map, insofar as it is there at all. Since, for many years, the Venice Film Festival committee prohibited Swedish films on the same prudish grounds for which they are either barred from, or excised for, the United States, the work of Bergman and Sjöberg, who have no superiors in the art of film-making anywhere, has received little attention outside of Scandinavia. The fate of *The Naked Night* in New York last year is unhappily characteristic of the treatment accorded Swedish films. Our press reviewers, unprepared by prestige clues, were baffled or bored by the production which ran nine weeks at its first showing only because the theatre owner also happened to hold distribution rights to the film. Sparse bookings nationally will be the likely consequence, instead of the wide, and close, attention the film deserves. Like most of Bergman's scenarios, *The Naked Night* (title designed to suggest the Swedish proclivity for undress?) turns an unsparing scrutiny on the struggle between the sexes, its con-

³In reality, Ernst Udet, the anti-Nazi flyer, model for Zuckmayer's General Harras, was killed by the Party before he had the opportunity (or the desire?) to kill himself; they planted a bomb in his plane.

tingent subject the self-punishing efforts of a couple—the aging owner of a traveling circus and his young mistress (this is Sweden at the turn of the century)—to liberate themselves from an intensely possessive relationship: he by way of his deserted ex-wife, she through an impetuously willful affair with a sadistic actor of equivocal sexual tastes. They are both rejected and return to each other before the circus moves on at the end of the film, but not before the man, Albert, has been exposed to a relentless humiliation of his sexual pride, and the filmgoer has been submitted to an almost unendurable laceration of his sympathy. Bergman has a perfectly hellish understanding of what goes on, psychically, between male and female, and since his craftsmanship is equal to his psychology he is probably responsible for Hilding Bladh's crystal camera-eye, which catches images of beauty and of crucial desperation as if it were balancing precious water in a goblet.

One of the most creative passages in film since the great Russian experiments of the Twenties is a thematic prologue, as it were, wherein the pathetic Frost (a supporting character), dressed as Pierrot, staggers across a rocky beach to rescue his wife from the consequences of her own exhibitionism. The film print is treated in such a way (possibly double-duplicated?) as to present an etiolated texture, thoroughly macabre, and although laughter and imprecations are mouthed, no sound is heard save a terrible drum accompaniment. That such cinematic inspiration should have been promoted solely on the pulchritude (indisputable!) of its leading actress, Helen Anderssen—and even so, fail to make a stir—indicates the poverty of film criticism and promotion alike.⁴

The only film of recent release that competes with Bergman's for sheer force of impact, with another kind of rhythm, is *O Cangaceiro*, usually referred to as *The Bandit*. Edited by a German and photographed by someone with the un-South-American name, Chick Fowle, the movie was written, directed and produced by Lima Barreto, Portuguese Brazilian, and financed by the Bank of Sao Paulo. For two years the film has been in circulation, limited, I would presume, judging by the few people I have been able to discover who have seen it. Just as the guillotine in *Casque D'Or* was a climactic image for the tone of the whole movie, a garotte would be the appropriate ideogram of *O Cangaceiro*, although death by strangulation is the one kind not represented in the film (it would have been kinder than any that are!). An introductory title specifies, "The time is indefinite. When there were still outlaws." After this sardonic subterfuge, Barreto and his cameraman proceed to show Hollywood the meaning written in the scorched dust under their big nerveless feet since the Western was born as a category.

The jaguar, enticed by the simulated whistle of his mate, meets death instead . . . Or, in synopsis: a band of outlaws under the leadership of

⁴Those who have seen the film will have been disturbed by the unprepared introduction of the symbolic caged bear. I have been assured that the original print contained footage rather more explicit. Who was responsible for the deletions I've been unable to ascertain.

Captain Galdino Ferreira (as filthy-stiff-with-pride a little beast as you ever saw on the screen) raids a defenseless village—somewhere on the pampa—and carries off, among less reluctant female captives, a school-teacher of relatively patrician background whom Galdino spares from indignity, ostensibly in order to collect ransom money. Teodoro, a lieutenant with Christian memories, without waiting for the issue of his suspicions, escapes from camp with the lady and after a cross-country 'journey perilous' returns her to the civilisation where she belongs. He then stoically awaits punishment from his compadres. He receives it. That's all . . .

In outline that's all. A hint of the level at which the film is conceived will be suggested by Teodoro's answer to Olivia's question, "Why are you risking your life for me?" His reply: "A man wouldn't have asked." But this gives no hint of the visual excitement of the movie, of the raffish style of the actors (Milton Ribeiro's Galdino is unimaginable!), or of the pulsating Brazilian folk-tunes which animate the score. Or of that breath of the inexorable which, in every interlocking episode, conquers slickness with veracity. One such episode will establish my point. Following the raid mentioned above, a volunteer posse from the surrounding area rides into Galdino's territory to avenge the rape of their families. They seal their doom by a quixotic neglect of strategy, riding straight into ambush, where, to a man, they are implacably picked off. During this briefly tragic engagement they never once see the enemy which is annihilating them, for Galdino's men are indistinguishable from the mesquite and pampa grass in which they have taken cover. With a perversion of courtesy that chills the blood, the banditti respect the principle, Rank has its Privileges, allowing the leader of the foolhardy contingent to remain erect, untouched, till his company has been dispatched. In response to the screaming profanity with which he then invokes his own reward (this seems to be part of the convention) they riddle him with bullets. While firing in pointless return, the defeated man continues to hurl invective, even as he is brought to his knees and finally to the ground. With a gesture of insatiable impotence, barely able to lift his head, he now rams in his last clip of cartridges, and the gun empties itself with a stutter of futility into the chaparral. Before sinking lifeless over the spasmodic weapon, the man ejaculates, "Filth!"—and it's impossible at this juncture to know whether he is addressing Galdino personally, all of the bandits, humankind, or that God who permits a man to die like a cornered, tortured rabbit under a planetary sky, without succor, with but hostile witnesses . . . The dreadful piercing nihilism of this film is ennobled by the weirdly dignified staunchness and fatality from which everyone, Galdino included, derives his strength. In a neglected 'fiction', too drily entitled *Southwest*, John Houghton Allen expressed admirably a text for this manner of outcome:

...there is never anything ridiculous about those who die for the shadow, or those who take the losing side, or those who stand alone, or

those in general who live dangerously—because even when you are betrayed, it is with a strange pathos.

Aside from the fact that there's something more bitter than pathos in the residue of this film, I would say that Allen's gnomic sentence fairly justifies its general temper.

Surprising as it may be to admirers of Akiro Kurasawa, who plausibly expect the master of *Rashomon* to produce only masterpieces, a comparison of his *The Magnificent Seven* (originally *Seven Samurai*) with *O Cangaceiro* is markedly in Barreto's favor. Kurasawa, unlike the Brazilian, fails to disengage the intrinsic meaning from the core of his melodramatic commitment. His plot substance is the preparation for and defense of a remote mountain village from marauders, under the hasty tutelage of hired warriors,⁵ and his introduction promises great moments: a syncopated drum motif, and thundering horsemen, outriders of doom, against a dingy sky. They rein unsteadily to a halt, survey the sleepy mountain village they intend plundering when the crops are gathered, months hence, and ominously gallop away. After their staccato dialogue and clattering exit, a hush—gently invaded by a rising bird-song. But from there in Kurasawa seems to have been told, like Lady Macbeth, that his undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males, for he was clearly bent on developing the most virtuoso action movie ever attempted, without benefit of chariots, galleons, buffaloes, pyramids or whales. Nothing up his sleeve but five barley loaves and seven small samurai. Filmgoers who are easily overcome by operational genius will assert that Kurasawa performs his miracle. Cinematically, the film is certainly adroit, a succession of pyrotechnics: variable speed-cutting, close-in work, dynamic panning, overheads—and underfoot!—wonderful sword-and-spear prowess, horsemanship that unseats you from nervousness. More filmic ingenuity is shown off in a thousand feet of shooting than in the annual cinemascopic output spread end to end. And physiographically the movie is all there, too; it establishes a scene, a rugged hill-trapped rat-hole kind of settlement, ringed by fitfully lighted forest under permanently sullen skies—houses with dark primitive interiors that suggest corncribs rather than the dwellings of man. The guerilla contest which takes up fully the last half of the film (and I saw the uncut version—you're actually lucky) is a vortex of rain, mud, bamboo spears, redundant skirmishes, and banners that flap in the wet wind with a sound of drum-heads. All this is cinematic muscle, equalled in tensility by few films ever; *Alexander Nevsky* is the closest contender.

But the film has no heart. It narrates compellingly the rigors of subsistence-level creatures fighting to maintain a bare foothold; human aware-

⁵Unemployed samurais, as a result of the deposition or elimination of the noble families on whom they were customarily dependent, were common in the factional period represented by this film. Known as *ronin* (i. e. men without masters—literally *wave-men*), they were often willing to fight for room and board, so to speak—i. e. a roof and a rice allowance!

ness is absent. No sentiment is internalized by a single character long enough to command our anguish as well as our suspense. If it were *real*, it would be affecting; a documentary can afford to forego internalization, to a degree not permissible in a fiction movie. Nothing is at stake here but survival, and if it can be retorted that survival is, after all, everything, it is also true that a narrative work of art must make survival count by incarnating its imaginative values through a consciousness. The heroic clown played by Mifune (the bandit of *Rashomon*) is stoutly a man; he is scarcely a consciousness. His death does not move us; at the last he's what you see: a corpse on a bridge, with bare buttocks. The interjected 'love interest' cannot move us, either. Renunciation will be simple for the young samurai, for we don't believe he has touched anything—except his sword. Only in the closing shots does something like epic stature emerge, as the surviving samurai prepare to move on. Standing before the graves of their buried confederates, as the villagers in the fields below resume their eternally earth-bound ritual of planting for a dubious harvest, "They have survived," one samurai observes, "and they have their earth. What do we have?"

Anywhere but in Southern California, it would seem, a movie director can still try, at least, for the great themes and the small winnings. Only where "money is no object" are no risks taken for the sake of a decent perception, for an adventure which may be unpopular but isn't fraudulent, for ninety minutes, more or less, which might add their cinematic sum to the statements about man which evade neither his inordinate folly, his complicated chivalry nor his dirty unanswerable pain. If I terminate these remarks by again invoking the aesthetic of the bullfight, I ask to be absolved from any taint of obsession, pleading pertinence as my excuse. My epilogue is taken from the "Mexican Journal" of Rico Lebrun, the Italian painter. I find it sharper than vintage Hemingway.

"Do you work close?" asked Simon [a torero] superciliously, staring at me. "Do you work close to the picture?"

"Of course he does," said Paco [a doctor]. "I have seen him do it. Close it is, boy. He ruins many an effect because he is a mule against fear. He can paint out a whole house in a picture and replace it with a firefly."

"No me diga!" said Simon. "Don't tell me! He doesn't know what he's doing. I don't change my mind in the middle of a veronica."

"It's not the same thing, stupid," answered Paco. "Can't you see that it is not? The way they work they never see the animal until it's all over. You could say that they work blindfolded like horses and stay in close. Others, the not-so-good painters, work away from the animal and save their glass posteriors with great precision. They live longer, they paint worse."

KENNETH B. SAWYER

Art Chronicle

SPORADICALLY, the Museum of Modern Art scrawls a chapter of current history across its walls. Sometimes these chapters are written with more hindsight than insight, sometimes they are not chapters at all, but marginalia from a faded manuscript. Generally, however, they at least describe one gyre of traffic on The Street. The summer's '12 Americans' show was such an effort and, in some quarters at any rate, it received more than its quota of public ingratitude and critical injustice.

In retrospect, we tend, as we probably should, to sift off the chaff from previous 'Americans' shows. When we do, Dorothy C. Miller, who has organized them since 1942, seems a rare brave soul. In retrospect, we range through galleries pulsing with canvases by Still, Pollock, Rothko, Gorky, and Motherwell; we climb once again through Kiesler's vast Correalist woods, forgetting through the dim merciful years rooms simpering with Aronson, Pickens, MacIver, Sharrer, Kriesberg, Rose, Glasco, and Lippold. We forget, too, the rooms we hunted, but failed to find—rooms for Smith, Hofmann, deKooning, Newman and a few others still waiting to be properly welcomed to the iron precincts. It seems unimportant now, but at the time it didn't—it seemed programmatic indifference.

The most recent installment of the eternal serial was—with some tiresome quibbles—a thumping good show. More thumping, I think, than most of my colleagues were prepared to admit. Clearly, the Kline and Guston sections were long past due, the Rivers premature, the sculpture a gratuitous historical gesture (as distinct from a compelling fact). All this is better admitted from the outset. But the show bears revisiting in the cool light of retrospection.

The painters included were Ernest Briggs, James Brooks, Sam Francis, Fritz Glarner, Philip Guston, Grace Hartigan, Franz Kline, and Larry Rivers; the sculptors, Raoul Hague, Ibram Lassaw, Seymour Lipton, and José de Rivera. The trend of the show was obvious and at this stage of the century hardly needs justification. Only Glarner, Hague, Rivera, and Rivers seemed misplaced—as if they had wandered in from the Whitney and stayed to see the fun.

Glarner (who should have been shown in 1946) is the legitimate heir to *de Stijl*. Legitimate, because he is the only painter of whom I am aware who both continues and augments it. He is by no means slavish; indeed, the neo-plastic preceptors—Mondrian and van Doesburg—would certainly have shuddered at his rebellions. That very recalcitrance at once extends his scope beyond and a bit to the right of pure neo-plasticism; he has quarrelled with the dogma that "space determinism, and not space expression, is the pure plastic way to express universal reality". Like

Mondrian, he is concerned with rectilinear forms in compact interplay. But illusionistic space, and, to some extent, volume, is implied by tonal vibrations in close juxtaposition. A few juts and recessions, inclined planes, and bent outlines at once decrease neo-plastic tension and intensify its emotion. But Glarner leads us to Erebus; the steel-band tautness of Mondrian (especially in the 'thirties) has been sacrificed to the pleasure-principle of momentary relaxation (he does not extend emotionality to the point of organic transposition). In "12 Americans", his Relational oils are less serene than static—which, of course, may be another way of interpreting "universal reality".

Rivers has insisted that his "approach is of no importance". I should be inclined to respect that statement more were it not quite apparent that his seminal gimmick is a tricky, modernist ambiguity imposed on (or perhaps *subtracted from* is more to the point) the quasi-grand manner canvases that he shows. In the later oils (1954-5), he seems to be examining problems left unsolved with Manet's defection to Impressionism. The earlier, ectoplasmic sketchiness has been replaced by a more forthright academicism (although his drawing isn't always sound); in a picture like "Double Portrait of Berdie" and "Figures in Interior" (in the 1955 Whitney Annual), there are patches of genuinely "grand" brushing (which are, however, submerged in obtrusive matter and amateurish dead spots). Although Rivers is a painter of talent, one senses in his work a hankering after old-fashioned Surrealism; with a fresh vocabulary of symbols and a less constricting technic, he may still surmount the limitations of his present mannerism.

Although about the same age as Rivers, Grace Hartigan is his aesthetic senior by at least a decade. In the oils she was exhibiting as recently as three years ago, I objected to the unassimilated influences that cropped out periodically even while I was admiring the vigor of her attack. De-Kooning stalked her manner like an unquiet spook. In "12 Americans", she seems to have arrived at the personal synthesis toward which she has been working; she has jettisoned academic modernism and with it much (not all) of the uncertainty that plagued canvases like "The Showcase" (in the Whitney Annual, 1955-6). The large "River Bathers" is, I think, her crucial work to date. Without sacrificing the furious energy that has always distinguished her brushing, Miss Hartigan has discovered a lyrical basis for her art. With a series of interlaced vertical planes, trumpeting with color, she has, I think, realized for the first time the strength of her own potential. In doing so she has offered us a foretaste of something important.

James Brooks is an extremely seductive painter. For those who respond to saturated colors in relaxed and unstartling balances, he is practically irresistible—particularly in the most recent work. Brooks is above all things a colorist—perhaps the only born colorist among the painters shown. In the earlier work, there is a stiffness, an implicit limning between the organic forms that ebb and flow across the surface of his canvases. Despite the dryness of his paint, color areas seem liquescent as tidal

pools mustered into order. In the newer painting, the stiffness is gone, and with it the strength. With increased control (not always an unmixed blessing) the recent work seems at once irresolute and too immediately accessible to be lasting.

Like Brooks, Philip Guston is a veteran "younger painter". His rewards have come late and mainly for the wrong reasons. When he flared into fashion last spring with a brilliantly successful show at the Sidney Janis Gallery, nearly everyone—painters, critics, and collectors—ran fey with superlatives. I was, I'm afraid, the only dissenter; I am still, but with a few less objections than before. Guston is a dazzling brushman. The dusk glow of his surfaces, the subtle building of his planes and the quickening rhythms toward the center of his canvases are supremely sure; no other painter in America could have achieved them within the prescribed range.

Structurally, his work is stronger than its sources (late Impressionism)—the black and white brush-drawings at Janis' were a clue to the schema of his oils—but his composition (centrifugal) strictly delimits the scope of his efforts. His master, Monet, discovered the relationship between equalized values and ambiguity of composition nearly a half-century ago. The very gorgeousness of a Guston canvas is its weakness: he seems unable to resist that final overenriching stroke of rose, that last, too enlushing surface tension. At best (as in "The Room"), he achieves a nostalgic melancholy, at worst ("To B. W. T."), he is very near to mawkishness.

Ernest Briggs studied with Clyfford Still at the California School of Fine Arts—everyone has begun with that and I see no reason to deny it since it happens to be true. But what Briggs learned from Still—what all of Still's students seem to have learned—has very little to do with the laying on of paint: it is an attitude toward the act of painting (which I think Briggs would have learned in any case), toward the gesture of painting removed from the fashionable paradigms of academic modernism. He appears to regard the canvas as a battlefield on which certain ideas and emotions must be tried against each other with all the fury of an assault on heaven. The slashing strokes—brush, palette knife, occasional direct pouring—streak upward in a reverse torrent of prisms. The impact on the upper edge of the canvas is shattering, but not impeding: the spear-shaped strokes break into fragments of shining reds, yellows, blues and blacks, resolving themselves into climax after climax.

In the immense (8' x 12' 3") "Painting, 1955"—a triptych in that it is constructed of three separate canvases, each of which could stand alone as a picture—Briggs has begun to deepen his space, not by the conventional trick of shadowing, but by means of a layer of swirling atmospheric paint operating both before and beyond the picture plane. The result is an integration of prisms into a more complete and powerful expression of form. It is, I think, the first example of Briggs' mature manner.

Perhaps no debut in the past five years has occasioned so much consternation as that of Sam Francis at the Martha Jackson Gallery last season. Francis, already something of a legend in Paris where he has

worked since leaving California in 1950, proved once and for all that he is anything but a revenant from the banks of Lutece. The fact that most reviewers scarcely knew what to make of him is not surprising: to a generation grown accustomed to scale, Francis' work seems *beyond* scale (size has only metaphysical meaning in his painting, which occupies space in the sense that the sky "occupies" space). The oils, while dramatic in their own way, are not stunning objects as—say—a deKooning is a stunning object. They are *presences*, transcendent not imminent. Although response to his first New York show was cautious, a curious situation began to develop within a month of it: nearly everywhere where painting is discussed, one found people casually including Francis' name alongside those of the brahmins of Abstract Expressionism.

His inclusion in "12 Americans" implies the proportions of that acceptance. Using what appears at first to be a monochrome palette, he stains into the fabric soft, consecutive forms that multiply slowly across the face of the canvas, seeming to spread to the wall and finally to envelop the viewer himself. From the monochrome surface, the entire spectrum begins to appear, only to disappear again before crystalizing into shapes. Occasionally, a Francis painting will glow like a furnace, sometimes it will baffle the eye with a steely blue-black wall, but usually it simply envelops, as if one had been caught in a mysteriously slow storm of minerals. If Briggs is a painter of climaxes, Francis is a painter almost entirely indifferent to them. When a climax occurs, it is likely to occur at the very edge of the canvas, gratuitous as a gracenote. Paintings are somehow expected to have impact; as a result we demand distance to see them as entities. It is an error to regard Francis' work in this way: his vast oils are not cabinet pictures, but engulfing atmospheres. They are, I think, among the most important works of art being created today by a painter under forty.

It seems almost insulting to have included Franz Kline. If a tribute was intended, it should have been paid in 1952—two years after the historic Egan show. As it was, his section in "12 Americans" was, together with Guston's, the most frantically applauded. It deserved to be. Perhaps the most surprising thing about Kline's work is that it bears up so well under scrutiny. The calligraphic simplicity is, like all controlled simplicity, misleading. Kline's canvases are as immediate as any being produced in our time, yet second glance is better than first, and third is better than either. The secret of the lasting quality of his work is twofold: the utter freshness of the organization of two-dimensional space, and the furious energy of which every painting is compounded. Never at rest, these uncompromising canvases seem viciously intent on thrusting their edges beyond the literal possibility of easel art.

Black and white stand at the poles of traditional tonal value; in Kline's work they do not negate color, but replace it—or rather render it unnecessary. Each painting somehow encompasses all color, burning it clean of the incidental vibrations of a full palette (in the few colored oils he has shown to date, he has used color as if it were black). His

calligraphic forms are, in some quarters, still being misread as Oriental in source; this is, I think, due at least in part to the visual habit of regarding black over white as a projective value (whether it operates that way or not). In most of Kline's paintings black and white are equally functional. In "Cardinal", for example, the plane of the canvas is broken in almost equal ratio by horizontal and vertical lines, deepened and relaxed by semicircular forms. The white ground, instead of behaving like a ground, is as active as the ragged black elements that play over it. The white thrusts, no less than the black, serve to fling the pattern into space almost like sculpture. Indeed, if any painter may be said to cross the bridge between contemporary painting and sculpture, it is Franz Kline.

Unfortunately, there is no one in the sculpture section of "12 Americans" to meet him midway. If painting is our current strength, sculpture is our weakness; only David Smith, who has not yet been honored with a show at the Modern, can be cited against the half-score painters who are shaking the dust from Western art. Somehow any list of names—Roszak, Noguchi, Hare, Ferber, Lippold—lacks authority to stand with the present pantheon of the brush. Hague, Lipton, Lassaw, and Rivera add, I'm afraid, little grandeur to the number.

Second thoughts are not always better than first, but in the case of Hague they seem so. It was, after all, good to see an honest carver again. In the past decade, more and more sculptors of talent have turned toward braised metal. This is by no means the tragedy that some museum directors have pretended but it provides only a limited view of the total plastic potential. Hague is a carver in the grand manner of carving. His earlier work—"Champville Limestone", "Ohayo Wormy Butternut", "Tennessee Marble"—is figurative; his more recent pieces retain a nostalgia for the human figure. They are large, solid—and dull. Perhaps the intricacies of forged metal have spoiled us for this sort of thing, but I doubt it. Hague's hewn forms are simply wanting in the "interesting-ness" that Brancusi's woods have conditioned us to expect.

Lassaw has described his work as being particularly concerned with "space development involving relations of greater and lesser densities of concentration—a thickening or thinning of space". He is also preoccupied with patinas—most of the work in "12 Americans" was lush with verdigris. Unfortunately, for all their calligraphic elaboration, for all their tricky "glazing", they seemed as slight as interior decoration. They are not "museum pieces" (one feels that they require a more constricted *mise en scene*), but intimate adjuncts of small architecture—satisfactory for the boudoir perhaps, but too slight for the hall.

José de Rivera, like Glarner, is something of an anachronism. At this point in the twentieth century, the discovery of beauty in machine-tooled precision seems a bit beside the point. The simplified arcs and arabesques that comprise Rivera's part of the show are handsome, cool, and a little tiresome. Tiresome because—like Lever House—we have seen it all before in a dozen avatars. The flowing line, the gleaming surface, the Jordan

Curve, all have a Jazz-Age glint that is more historic than integral.

Gonzalez started more hares than he ever dared imagine. One of the liveliest is Seymour Lipton. Lipton is an imaginative craftsman suffering a plethora of technique. Far from being intimidated by the already formidable problems of welded metal, he seems determined to devise new ones. In enclosing positive space, he has contributed importantly to the plastic period style. His formal strength compels admiration and his complexities are genuine (as opposed to Lassaw's). My objection to Lipton's work is similar to my objection to Guston's: the apparent inability to resist a final cadenza. If a Lipton maw is menacing, it must be menacing without reserve; if a Lipton volute is organic, it must be positively parturient. He seems capable of every possibility the medium affords—the trouble is that he attempts them all in every piece.

Inevitably, "12 Americans" will suffer by comparison with the 1952 version (which included Pollock, Still, Rothko, Tomlin, and Kiesler—an impressive battery in any league), yet there was a youthfulness about it that I found lacking in the earlier show. Occasionally, one wishes that Miss Miller had ranged farther afield for her painters (I am referring specifically to Morris Lewis of Washington, D.C. and Frank Lobdell of San Francisco), and perhaps she will in time. But one thing is heartening and certain: if the New Academy has begun to form, Miss Miller's kind of Americans want no part of it.

Notes on Contributors (*cont.*)

MARVIN MUDRICK, of the University of California, is working on a critical study of Chaucer.

OLIVIER TODD is the regular Paris correspondent of this Review.

VERNON YOUNG is writing a book on *100 Great Films*.

KENNETH B. SAWYER works on the *Baltimore Sun*, and is to be a speaker at The American Federation of Arts Conference at Houston in April.

The noted composer, ROGER SESSIONS, teaches at Princeton.

A new book of criticism by NORTHROP FRYE, *Anatomy of Criticism*, is to be published this spring by the Princeton University Press.

THOMAS BARBOUR has been acting in the off-Broadway revival of Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning*.

BENJAMIN DE MOTT is an Associate Professor of English at Amherst whose stories and essays have been widely published.

HARVEY SWADOS has been teaching at the University of Iowa; his new book of fiction, *On the Line*, will be published in the fall by Atlantic-Little, Brown.

Reviews

ROGER SESSIONS

Opera as an Art Form

MR. KERMAN's book¹ is good reading. Not only is he an intelligent young man, whose love for music is genuine and obvious, and with whom it is a pleasure to match wits; but the subject is a challenging, elusive, and fascinating one, which is often misunderstood in the most radical manner. The misunderstanding arises from the fact that opera is a compound medium, perhaps in fact the most complex of all artistic *media*, consisting as it does of a marriage between two arts, each of which pursues, outside of marriage, an existence of its own on the very highest level of development. As this is the case, it is hardly surprising that there are those who prefer that music and drama should live in what they consider single-blessedness. It is also not surprising that, as Mr. Kerman wisely points out, the marriage institution in question can lead to a wide variety of equally felicitous results. Least surprising of all is the fact that the marriage is frequently infelicitous, and for a variety of causes. Doubts regarding the artistic validity of opera are wide-spread and vocal especially in English-speaking countries, in which a literary culture is so predominant that the "adjustments" which are inevitable in any marriage are widely resented from the literary side. Mr. Kerman's book, as a note on the jacket indicates, comes out of this context, and is in fact a plea for opera as a serious art form—a plea which would lose much of its relevance in, say, Italy or Germany, where many of the points which Mr. Kerman attempts to make clear are familiar, and abundantly taken for granted, not only in the spirit of operatic production, but to an equal extent in the consciousness of the public. But here in the United States, where opera is barely emerging from the status of a luxury entertainment, of which the charm resides in its remoteness from reality and hence from drama in any genuine sense, these points need to be emphasized with insistence. Quite apart from the intrinsic interest of Mr. Kerman's book, such discussion is both relevant and timely. Though Mr. Kerman does not specifically mention the fact, it is worth pointing out that in the run-of-the-mill repertory, works manage to persist which, though weak and undistinguished by any musical standards, are somehow plausible theatrically—Boito's *Mefistofele* is one of the better examples; while on the other hand, certain works recognized to be of the highest musical value have from their beginnings always faced tough sledding, because of texts which were hopeless from the theatrical point of view. The strangest example of this latter is Carl Maria von Weber's *Euryanthe*. Not only was Weber a composer of genius, but he was an experienced man of the theater; and *Euryanthe* contained his most mature music as well as being

¹OPERA AS DRAMA, by *Joseph Kerman*. Knopf \$4.50.

his most ambitious work. It contains individual scenes of extraordinary dramatic power. No less a figure than Richard Wagner admired and loved it passionately, and musical connoisseurs often refer to it as "the best of Wagner's earlier works"—including for instance *Lohengrin*. Yet its text is so hopeless that it has successfully resisted innumerable attempts, through revision and through the arts of production, to bring it to life on the stage. This fact is made still more striking through the perennial success, at least on the European continent, of Weber's musically uneven and far less mature *Der Freischütz*, and the frequently successful revival of *Oberon*, in spite of a text which, though poor, is at least viable.

Mr. Kerman's discussion is essentially a sketch of operatic history in terms of the central problem, as embodied in works which he considers masterpieces: the contrasting treatments of the *Orpheus* legend by Monteverdi at the beginning of the seventeenth century and Gluck in the middle of the eighteenth; Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*; the four "great operas" of Mozart; Beethoven's *Fidelio*; Verdi's *Otello*; Wagner's *Tristan*; Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*; Berg's *Wozzeck*; and Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. It is in the concrete discussion of these works that Mr. Kerman is perhaps at his best. He knows the works thoroughly, his knowledge is that of genuine love and enthusiasm, and the reader is often struck by the acuteness of his insight, both into the music immediately in question and in its function as operatic expression. To be sure, many will quarrel with his choice of works. This particular reviewer, as a matter of fact, does not, on any grounds whatever. In the main, his own choices would have been very similar, though he would have added at least two works, and in the cases of Gluck and Verdi he does not feel that Mr. Kerman has chosen the composers' very greatest works. But a book designed on this basis is inevitably a very personal one; and for all Mr. Kerman's scholarly virtuosity, his book is pre-eminently so. This is said in a spirit of full approval. A critic has, certainly, obligations towards his subject as such. But these obligations have first of all to do with penetration, and should be pursued all the way along that line, and certainly not along the line of neutrality. While the area of penetration should be as large as possible, it is in depth rather than extent that penetration really counts. Mr. Kerman's book is at all times interesting, and, often, for those who share his knowledge of, and love for, the works of which he writes, a delight to read.

Nevertheless, this reviewer, though fully agreeing with Mr. Kerman's main thesis, does not feel that he has completely reached the heart of the matter. There are undoubtedly two reasons why this is so. One of these is acknowledged in the last paragraphs of the book by Mr. Kerman himself. He speaks of the "fortuitous individuality" of genius—a point well-remembered, and nowhere more evident than in opera. Mr. Kerman's insistence on this point already sets him on a level considerably higher than most of his colleagues, whether scholarly or critical. The marriage of music and drama has led to such diversified results, and the character

of the resultant solutions—even the successful ones—has been so varied, that the problem itself must seem at times an almost hopelessly elusive one, and the search for criteria full of dangerous pitfalls.

Then, too, Mr. Kerman's very attitude of defense is also full of pitfalls which, in the opinion of the reviewer, he has not been wholly successful in avoiding. Early in the book, and very rightly, he rejects two erroneous attitudes; "the one held by musicians that opera is a low form of music, and the one held by everyone else, that opera is a low form of drama." Neither attitude, according to the reviewer's experience, is nearly as prevalent as Mr. Kerman suggests; and both are far more prevalent in English-speaking countries, which have no real operatic tradition of their own, than anywhere else. But in trying to "justify" opera as drama, Mr. Kerman tends in detail, though by no means in theory, to refer constantly to the criteria of spoken drama, which actually are misleading in this connection. For opera is drama, above all, not *with*, or even *heightened by* music, but drama *in* and *through* music. It is in the music and not in the text that the characters live and develop; they are what the music, and not what the text or even the external action, makes them. This, again, is not the result of an aesthetic fiat but because of the very nature of the mediums involved. Not only is music the medium of stronger immediate emotional potency, but in the case of opera it is the most potent of musical vehicles—the voice—which is of primary importance and effect. Thus, for instance, it is for this reason above all that, as Mr. Kerman notes, Verdi's *Otello*, *Iago*, and *Desdemona* are somewhat different from Shakespeare's characters of the same name in a similar situation. In one of his less appropriate sentences—there are a number of such—Mr. Kerman describes Verdi's *Desdemona* as "a creature of the colorful and not notably innocent romantic Renaissance" of the late nineteenth century "as capable of adultery as she is of passion in the grand manner." He has already dealt at length with the apparent contrast between the two *Desdemonas* in terms of articulateness; and it is true, of course, that Verdi was a man of nineteenth century Italy, though, one might point out, a contemporary of Manzoni, not of D'Annunzio. But what Mr. Kerman seems to forget is that *Desdemona* is, and ineluctably must be, an operatic soprano. She has to sing, in other words; and it is in the very nature of the operatic medium that she must be articulate in a sense that Shakespeare's *Desdemona* is not. The unfolding of drama in music imposes requirements quite different from those of spoken drama. In opera the "inarticulate" characters are the minor or unrealized characters; and if a character is to live as anything more than a shadowy presence, he or she must become "vocal" in the figurative as well as the literal sense.

An opera, in other words, is primarily a musical work, not in any real sense a literary one. It is none the less truly drama for that fact. But the drama is activated through the music, and becomes real precisely to the extent, and precisely in the manner that the music succeeds in

making it so. For this reason—and on no other grounds whatever—this reviewer agrees wholeheartedly with Mr. Kerman in regarding *Die Zauberflöte* as the greatest of Mozart's works, and in regarding *Fidelio* as one of the supreme masterpieces of opera, though on the same grounds he disagrees with Mr. Kerman's reservations in regard to *Così fan Tutte* and *Don Giovanni*. Mr. Kerman's remarks concerning *Così fan Tutte* are intelligent, as one would expect; there is certainly a discrepancy between text and music. But then, there is a discrepancy also in *Die Zauberflöte*—and one which has disturbed both musicians and critics fully as much. It is engaging to see Mr. Kerman waving the one problem aside, through his enthusiasm, while dwelling on the other. But both problems exist, and in both cases it is the power of Mozart's music, and the power of the drama embodied in that music, which solves them. It accomplishes this by lifting both texts—one of them essentially banal and frivolous, the other naive and confused—to a level where they become purely symbolic, and their human core is the only "reality" which remains. They were the ripest works of a man of genius who, like very few others, achieved a lifetime of experience in a very short span of years, and arrived, still in his early thirties, at a point which only the very greatest attain, and at the end of a much longer career. In other words, they are "late" works; and like many other late works, both in literature and in music—no doubt in the visual arts as well—they embody problems with which the usual norms of criticism seem only inadequately to cope, since such works also seem to add a new dimension to the already mature style of the composer in question.

The portion of Mr. Kerman's book which has aroused the most discussion is that which deals with Strauss and Puccini, whom he considers as embodying tendencies typical of a state of operatic doldrums which prevails to-day. The discussion is aroused not so much by this judgment in itself as by the intensity and the oversimplified manner in which Mr. Kerman presents it. Throughout the book, in fact, Mr. Kerman shows a tendency to paint in black and white, and consign to outer darkness whatever he does not fully like. The unsympathetic reader is likely to find him at the least opinionated, and at some moments immature. He is not averse to showing off, either by a display of erudition not entirely necessary to the real point of his argument, by an over-subtle approach to matters that are really simpler than he chooses to consider them, or by excessive wisecracking—a device which can miss fire if not used with the utmost discretion. Mr. Kerman's undeniable brilliance is on the whole the weakest aspect of the book, and one which does not at all do justice to his real qualities of insight and intelligence. It is these flaws, however, that give the book in places a somewhat academic, and at moments, at least for musicians, a slightly dilettantesque tone—they are lapses in ultimate responsibility, a quality which Mr. Kerman really possesses in a very high degree.

As far as Strauss and Puccini are concerned, one can understand and

agree with Mr. Kerman's general conclusions regarding the prevalent state of public operatic life, without being in the least able to accept his wholly negative judgment on these two composers. In part, Mr. Kerman is tilting at windmills. Very few people indeed, speak today of "Verdi and Puccini" or of "Wagner and Strauss", and the reviewer, who has moved about quite a bit in musical circles, was not a little surprised to learn from Mr. Kerman that "in the parterre it is agreed that *Turandot* is Puccini's finest work", since he never himself met anyone who held this opinion. In any case, it is inaccurate to regard Strauss or Puccini as either insincere or as scavengers in the garbage pails of Wagner and Verdi. They were, in fact, from all evidence quite "sincere". Even though not composers of the first magnitude, they were professionals producing works in the midst of an intensive and prosperous musical life which made great demands on them, quite as Verdi himself had been half a century earlier. Only the times, the public, and hence the demands were quite different. The peculiar vulgarity of both composers would have been unthinkable at any other period; and both composers sometimes fell back on routine—Strauss, no doubt, on routine of a superior kind, though his fall was much more complete and final. An appreciable residue remained—pages of sheer genius in *Salome* and especially *Elektra*, and a perfectly genuine if somewhat primitive freshness in at least certain works of Puccini. But it can hardly be said, at this date, that even Puccini dominates the current repertory; this is far less true today, in fact, than it was thirty years ago. Mr. Kerman's excitement in this regard is excessive; there have always been mediocre works in the operatic repertory, and the operatic crisis of today has a variety of causes, of which the most serious ones have little to do with opera, with music, or with the theatre as such.

One can find other flaws in the book. Carl Maria von Weber—certainly an extremely important figure—is not even mentioned. Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti are neatly disposed of in a paragraph, and *Carmen* is brushed off in a single very incidental reference which intimates that it is vastly overrated—if this is true, the list of its overraters is to say the least an extremely long and also a distinguished one. Mr. Kerman is, in fact, by no means free of snobbery, or in fact whole areas of snobbery, not the least of which is the constant implication that only the greatest masterpieces are worthy of his attention, and that even they are seldom fully satisfactory. It is mainly for this reason that one misses a certain essential and earthy quality in the book, which seems at times to move in a very rarefied atmosphere indeed. Mr. Kerman has still much to learn, and luckily has both the time and the capability to learn it. Meanwhile he has given us a stimulating and genuinely provocative discussion of a vital artistic problem. The book is well worth reading.

NORTHROP FRYE

Poetry of the Tout Ensemble

ONE OF THE most unfashionable poets in English literature, Charles Doughty, made the unfashionable remark: "The poet's task is not to meditate on human vanity, but to serve his country." Most of us would perhaps feel that such an observation was, first, quixotic (what country cares whether its poets want to serve it or not?), and, second, a recommending of what would in practice be a dismal bureaucratic flunkeyism, like the pseudo-arts of totalitarian states. In any case the social gestures of twentieth-century writers are mainly negative ones: gestures of defiance (Pound), of detachment (Valéry), of silence, exile and cunning (Joyce), of suicide, of transferred allegiance (Eliot), of religious conversion (usually to Catholicism in countries where Protestantism is popular), and so on. It is chiefly in such contexts as the French Resistance, where the negative gesture is appropriate, that we feel how much real truth there is in Doughty's statement. Certainly it seems surprisingly reassuring to discover a poet, who, like René Char,¹ is a man with a heroic personal record, and not less a poet for having it; who is both "engaged" in his life and yet exact and difficult in his art.

A new poet usually impresses his immediate contemporaries as "experimental," or some similar term meaning relatively unintelligible. By the time criticism has made an experimental poet intelligible it has also made him traditional. If he resists this process he drops out of sight, not because he was experimental, but because he was superficially traditional, a member of a school who went along for the ride. The criticism of Char, as revealed by a recent little volume,² is still in the first stages. What it says about Char is largely a series of amiable and enthusiastic gargles: we read sentence after sentence with no actual content, beyond a general emotional aim of deprecating analysis in favor of applause. Such writing results from an effort to convey the direct experience of reading the poet, an experience for which there are, of course, no words. One understands and sympathizes with it; but a glance at Char is enough to show that for him, as for Wallace Stevens, "poetry is the subject of the poem": he is intensely preoccupied with the theory and function of poetry. Besides, even in straight evaluation one is still left with the question: is Char's present reputation based solely on his merits, or is it in some measure due to the fact that he corresponds so closely to what an educated Frenchman, brought up in the tradition of Rimbaud and

¹HYPNOS WAKING: Poems and Prose by René Char. Selected and Translated by Jackson Mathews. With the collaboration of William Carlos Williams, Richard Wilbur, William Jay Smith, Barbara Howes, W. S. Merwin and James Wright. Random House. \$5.00.

²RENÉ CHAR'S POETRY. Studies by Maurice Blanchot, Gabriel Bounoure, Albert Camus, Georges Mounin, Gaëtan Picon, René Ménard, James Wright. Noonday. \$1.50.

aware of the tremendous spiritual potential of the Resistance, would expect the next great poet to be like?

Char's most obvious affinities are with the surrealists: like them he emphasizes the contrast between logical thought, which operates discursively and descriptively, and poetic thought, which operates by the immediate metaphorical identification of images. The latter is a direct and primitive form of thought which impresses the logical thinker as illogical to the verge of lunacy, or, if he is forced to take it seriously, as incredibly difficult and esoteric. Ordinary prose, or poetry approximating the idiom of prose like Wordsworth's, comes to terms with the logical thinker, which is what John Stuart Mill meant by calling Wordsworth the poet of unpoetical natures. Ordinary meter also comes to terms with him, as usually it is easy to see what concessions have been made from reason to rhyme. Char writes a good deal of his best poetry in the form of aphorisms, sentences which have the rhythm of prose but the imagery and concentration of poetry. These sentences are oracular, like the aphorisms of Heraclitus, a philosopher who has deeply impressed Char. Linear reading, of the kind we apply both to ordinary prose and to meter, will not do for them. The aphorism works on the principle of the Bloody Mary: it has to be swallowed at a gulp and allowed to explode from inside. It makes possible a kind of concentration that puts a considerable strain on Char's translators, who none the less do a both accurate and eloquent job. "What I have to do is hell," for instance, renders what in Char is simply "Devoirs infernaux." *Le Poème Pulvérisé* shows in its title how constantly Char works in the tradition of "fragmentation," deliberately breaking down everything that is continuous into a series of epiphanies or *illuminations*.

Char's imagery is based on the principle of opposites, another Heraclitean conception. The center of this principle is expressed in the title of the English collection, "Hypnos Waking." In ordinary life we have a "real" world of making consciousness and a submerged world of dream and desire. The latter is the source of poetry and of all creative effort: it struggles "against the real" to create a world that makes more sense in terms of desire. "The poet must keep an equal balance between the physical world of waking and the dreadful ease of sleep; these are the lines of knowledge between which he lays the subtle body of the poem." Poetry finds its fulfilment in a universe of its own, a universe symbolized by the term "Word" (*le Verbe*, as distinct from *le mot* or *la parole*), which is of course not another world from ours but another way of dealing with it. This verbal universe, a world of poetry rather than of poems or individuals, is also a human universe, a world of realized freedom, desire and intelligence. "Man be my metaphor," says Dylan Thomas, and Char says, "The being we do not know is an infinite being; he may arrive, and turn our anguish and our burden to dawn in our arteries." Like Rilke, he calls this being an "angel" to keep it "free of religious compromise." Thus, again as in Rilke, the poetic vision is from the circum-

ference, not the center. "Do not seek the limits of the sea. You contain them." For just as the poem finds its ultimate meaning in a total poetic universe, so man finds his own being in the corresponding human totality. "Imagination consists in expelling from reality several incomplete persons, and then using the magic and subversive powers of desire to bring them back in the form of one entirely satisfying presence." "Later," says the poet, "you will be identified as some disintegrated giant, lord of the impossible."

The conception of a verbal universe comes of course from Mallarmé: it is also in Valéry, but whereas Valéry tends to think of the poet's world in Platonic and contemplative terms, Char thinks of it existentially, as "engaged" in a redemptive death-struggle with the kind of world that produces such things as the Nazi occupation. "In poetry, only when there is communication and a free ordering of the totality of things among themselves, through us, are we ourselves engaged and defined." Hence he is obliged to struggle against the world of the "Hitlerian shadows", where there can be no such thing as a "dialogue between two human beings." Hence too fighters in the Resistance discover that "the language in use here comes from the sense of wonder communicated by the beings and things we live with in continual intimacy." The sense that there is no otherness, that the moment of time encloses the whole of experience, breeds the kind of desperation that allows tyranny to flourish. "Have nothing to do with those in whose eyes man is merely a passing shade of the color on earth's tormented back."

Thus the conventional religious conception of a world of eternal life, from which the "real" world has fallen and to which it will some day return, becomes in Char, as it does in most poets whether religious in temperament or not, an allegory of the poetic universe. There is a Fall: "When the dam of man broke . . . words were heard in the distance . . . struggling to resist the enormous pressure." Char's poems are "poems of the illuminated absolute, of the madly impossible resurrection." This latter pole is usually placed in the future: poetry is "life's future held in requalified man," and he asks whether the quest for a great being is "merely the finger of the chained present touching the future still at liberty." All through *Leaves of Hypnos*, a poetic diary of his fighting in the Resistance, we read of a new world dawning. Yet this feeling is not the usual donkey's carrot of people at war who hypnotize themselves into believing that the war is worth while because of all the wonderful things that will happen after it. Many of Char's associates in the Resistance entered the Maquis simply to be flattered by their own conscience: he will have nothing to do with this, and nothing to do with the future of the illusions to which it gives rise. The "real" world that produced the war is always here, and only poetry can do anything effective about it.

The total impression one gets of Char is of a powerful and somewhat humorless poet grinding and churning his way like a bulldozer through

the jungles of emotional confusion in contemporary life. Reading him, we see chiefly a chaos of uprooted trees, flying rocks and "pulverized" soil; retrospectively, we see an impressive sense of direction and a good deal of courage and perseverance in following it. We have mentioned Dylan Thomas: the contrast between them indicates how much difference in national temperament there still is even in this shrinking world. Char has nothing of Thomas's very British and Dickensian zest for absurdity: like Sartre and Camus, he can deal with the absurd only when he has got it established as a metaphysical principle, and can see at a distance that man's "head trails a wake through the galaxy of the absurd." Nevertheless, there is a more important issue which is common to both traditions. We have heard a good deal about the "dissociation of sensibility" in nineteenth-century poetry; we have naturally heard much less about a parallel dissociation in our own time, between poets of genuine warmth of feeling easily carried away by rhetoric (Jeffers, Lawrence), and poets of great technical skill who set up ironic barriers against feeling (Auden, Stevens).

Turning again to Char's critics, we notice how much they seem to think of Char as a kind of antidote to such a dissociation. We learn that Char is "a giant—a real physical giant," who gives a sense of personal authority because he "is a poet who believes what he says, and whose word we can trust." His "poetry is a total gesture of revolution," looking for a bigger transformation of society than, say, Marxism could achieve: he "is not a Christian" but "Salvation is always on his mind." He sounds in short like an old-fashioned Romantic liberal, and there are certainly many worse things to be than that. His references to Heraclitus and Georges de la Tour are in the height of intellectual fashion, yet his critics keep coming back to the same point: something which has long been neglected is being reasserted in Char. Rimbaud, Valéry, even Mallarmé: each seems to represent a dead end of some kind: they are all in different ways voices of silence, and Char, his admirers say, restores one's faith in both the present and the future of French poetry. None of them would mention Victor Hugo, yet one wonders whether in the welcome given Char there is not some sense of relief that there should finally be someone in France who knows all the tricks of twentieth-century style and still is not ashamed to echo the hoarse, uninhibited rhetoric of the great exile of Jersey who, both in literature and life, would, as Char says today of himself, "write no poem of acquiescence."

JOSEPH BENNETT

Sawdust and Wine¹

JOHN HOLLOWAY can write a poem which attracts the intellect and the emotions, which has the sense of reality, and which conveys hints of the mystery which lies beyond reality. His volume has a sustained, somewhat stuffy efficiency, and a good fraction of the shorter poems represent achievements above that humdrum monotone which runs through the book, and which in the longer poems allows wit to force out imagination, and seriousness to force out color, so that in these longer poems we have merely the customary intent, earnest intellectualising Englishman, painfully aware of his milieu but not realizing it.

The success of his shorter pieces suggests to me that the stuffiness is merely in the native air, and that Mr. Holloway is rising from it, freeing his wings. Let us hope so, because when he is of a mind to assert his independence of the climate, and the tone, he can be very good indeed. Not choosing, in these instances, to murmur in a closet with his colleagues, in earnest seriousness, he can be brilliant, and esthetically satisfying. In the starved conditions which surround him, such a stanza as

*No other hoard or spoil has gone
Into the bees' whole enterprise
Except that honey at their thighs:
But out of it they have created
The calm style of the hexagon,
In this one ritual having mated
A system sharp and bright as metal
With the soft opulence of petal . . .*

can be not only satisfying, but startling. How did this phoenix rise? We thought Yeats was dead. But here is Holloway's "Apollonian Poem" (from which this stanza is taken) rising from the sawdust.

It is not that Mr. Holloway does not have a great deal to learn. His achievements are small, but they are genuine. Fierce, absolute, uncompromising. Here is a poet who is learning how to write and who is putting away pretense. Five-eighths of the book should have been omitted. Why must the sawdust be served with the wine? Honors and sinecures await the imitators of the imitators of reality. He is not one of these. I have this to say of Mr. Holloway: he has the stuff from which greatness often arises. He should not be afraid to be himself. He should have more courage, and cut mercilessly until there is only the bone and sinew and

¹THE MINUTE AND LONGER POEMS. by *John Holloway*. The Marvell Press. \$2.50. HOMAGE TO MISTRESS BRADSTREET, by *John Berryman*. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. \$3.75. IN THE ROSE OF TIME, by *Robert Fitzgerald*. New Directions. \$3.00. GREEN WITH BEASTS, by *W. S. Merwin*. Knopf. \$3.50. THE FORM OF LOSS, by *Edgar Bowers*. Alan Swallow. \$2.00.

nothing in this book could be considered a candidate for those rewards which are given only to dullness. Poetry demands the whole of life; it implies a starvation of the soul for which there is only one solution: everlasting effort and discomfort.

Everyone should read and know about: "The Minute", "Apollonian Poem", "Meteor Stone", "Journey to the Capital", "Gulls in a Port", "The Brothers", "Winter Fountain", "Poem for Deep Winter". This is a long list. And there are also parts of "The Actor", "Elegy for an Estrangement", and "Warning to a Guest". These are all poems by John Holloway, a genuine projector of reality.

John Berryman is another poet who is riddled with the problem of creating reality. Conscience-stricken, scrupulous, fiery and bold, he has many advantages as a poet. He has authenticity; he has discomfort; he has starvation of the soul; his hands grope. How could we not wish to buck up Mr. Holloway's courage with some of Mr. Berryman's fire. And Mr. Berryman's vacillation with some of Mr. Holloway's strong-minded and scarred, sensible unity of purpose. Here are two very good poets indeed who could profit by an interchange of virtues.

Mr. Berryman holds nothing back; he is not interested in the virtues of sawdust, he pours fiery wine. The verities of dullness do not concern him; he arises from a much healthier literary milieu. Imaginative, irreconcilable, restless—he seeks to give the whole of life and the whole of his life to his works. In his earlier works his ambition was too stimulated and his passion too sharpened by conscious design; authenticity cannot be forced; the roots cannot be stuck in from above the soil.

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet is by far the most important work so far of Mr. Berryman's career. It offers (and deliberately so) a challenge to any critic.

At the very outset I must warn against attempts to pretend a stature for this poem which simply isn't there and what is more is not even remotely intended in its conception. The poem is an *ébauche*, a design for an important poem, it is true; but to imply that the sketch is in any way filled in, that it is anything but an idea, is to prevent us from seeing the very real merits of Mr. Berryman's poem, what it intends, what it achieves. Such pretense in the end is cruelly unfair to Mr. Berryman because it forces us to judge the work instantaneously and unquestionably as a failure, when such grandeur is predicated.

And the poem is not a failure; it is a success, an important success on its own terms, within its own severely limited objectives. It establishes Mr. Berryman (which his earlier work had not done) as an important and successful poet, not as a fool who tried for a colossal achievement and failed. A minor poet, like a minor architect, is as completely successful as a major one, once his terms are granted and the dimensions are adjusted. Sainte-Chapelle is just as much a success as Chartres.

Mr. Berryman's is a triumph of artifice, pure and rare and skillful, a golden bird on a golden bough. It adopts the stylistic method of Vic-

torian Gothic which used iron construction and glass dome-lighting to achieve medieval effects of which the middle ages could only dream. And red sandstone and brick, instead of fieldstone and timber.

How sophisticated, how modern, how authentic and up-to-the-minute is Mr. Berryman! He is using the best methods and the best materials of construction to achieve his vaulting, extraordinary effects. The effect of Victorian Gothic is an authentic one, clever and contrived and true. It rings through, pure and clear, like a bell cast from glass and iron, from beginning to end. This is an important work.

There is a lot of granite dredged up from the inhospitable seventeenth century New England shores and spread about unsparingly in these stanzas. The subject matter is authentic, primitive, distressed; the manner is difficult. Like the stone of H. H. Richardson's Romanesque fortress buildings of the nineteenth century, it is deliberately rough-hewn ("rusticated" is the term from masonry), with conscious plan, like the practice of "distressing" wooden panels for the creation of modern antiques. A poetry of artifice, a style of artifice, deft, clever, adept.

It is a poem of considerable challenge and unfulfilled opportunity, brilliance of expression and intellectual fire. There is a short-lived flare-up of spiritual flame at the beginning, and then the poem settles down to its task, which is basically, and hiddenly, quite plodding. The sustained brilliance of the stanza-form is staggering; Mr. Berryman brings out all the pyrotechnic of a master and keeps us dazzled by his technical proficiency, and breathless, from beginning to end. There is no room, no tolerance, no chance for dullness here. The blessed proficiency with his only outwardly crabbed stanza form carries Mr. Berryman through to a resounding finish.

The poem must be classified as an essay in a type, the type being archaism; as a preparation rather than a statement, a jungle and jangle of parts rather than a whole; but nice dissonance and rasping of parts on one another. It is a pleasure to the ear, and the sharp ideas and presences and spiritual extremities are a pleasure and a brisk exercise for the mind. Self-consciously Yankee, this essay in the Puritan and Protestant, in Massachusetts-Bay-Colonial, has a donnish, scholarly quality. This relates to the subject-matter, the stuff of the poem, the *reality* of it; not to the pyrotechnic of its spectacular technique. It is why the poem is never intended to be great, why it is never even started off in that direction. One is reminded of the thoughtful, labored studies of the Puritan psyche, with all its quirky contradictions, written by distinguished Professorial savants; studies which appear steadily, with solid authenticity, on the American literary scene.

Mr. Berryman has succeeded in conveying an acid, unpleasant, anguished and strenuous quality; a new note is struck, a nervous, anxious, stretching note, ex-centric and skeletal, and this, the *tone*, seems to me wholly successful, wholly original, wholly satisfying from the critical point of view. The spidery stanzas clack and thrash, the spindly lines waver out and sting with their aptness, their poisonous exactitude, their

pinpointed demonstration. An anatomy of analysis, a psyche dispersed in fragments of bone and sharp iron.

Mr. Berryman has created an essay in tone, in vibration, in attitude. He is musically quite interesting, with all the mutual reflections of his rhythms working adeptly in the sustained whole. This is his achievement; it makes the poem fascinating and of importance. It must be considered. It is part of the age. It is what we want to be like. But the pleasures it offers are purely esthetic. Aside from the chronicle of the narrative and the donnish pleasures of scholarly analysis, there is no subject matter other than on the pictorial level: stark, New England passions and extremes; spiritual conditions on a brightly-colored kaleidoscope. Nothing is said; nothing is developed.

I am excited by this poem. I like it immensely. It doesn't add up to much. But it has great excitement, great verve. It is very evocative. It is of the surface.

Robert Fitzgerald has a much more even and tempered artistic personality than Mr. Berryman. His *In the Rose of Time* is leisurely, quiet and reflective. It has merits which, though not perhaps of the order of Mr. Berryman's, are calm and reflective and sane, a needed and effective antidote. One senses a constructive presence; in a destructive world.

Mr. Fitzgerald has unusual virtues. He tries for what he can accomplish. The great translation-version of Book I of the *Georgics* is here; unquestionably a classic among classics; one of the great translations of our time. Sure-footed, steady, rational, it is an utter delight to all the faculties. So much is done with so little, and at such a secure, creeping pace. Here is an authenticity of subject-matter that Mr. Berryman could envy. And a triumph of tact, discretion and form. It is with relief that we turn to this voice of assurance and quiet certitude. The Villon translation is certainly the most successful of all the attempts that have been made on the poem. The Catullus, the Horace—Mr. Fitzgerald has proven again in these versions that a true translation is a work of genius, worthy to rank alongside its original. The range of Mr. Fitzgerald's gift is extraordinary.

Among the other poems, there is the honest and moving "Manuscript with Illumination"; the heartfelt subtlety of the "Meditation" sonnet; the quiet eloquence and confident, sustaining skill of "Counselors", in its reasoned length. But to me Fitzgerald's most effective and poignant lines, memorable and deeply incisive, occur at the end of "Mementoes":

*Milly and Daisy and Henrietta
And Isabel, beauties, pray for us
In your fresh heaven, on those lawns
By Thames under the copper beeches,
Behind the iron gates in ducal
Shadow; ambassadors! At Venice
Where the old and weary and splendid*

*Spiders of the world devoured you,
Who were not ever in anything
Quite so correct as they. Sisters,
Mothers later corrupted, maidens
Living like men into bewilderment
With a stiff upper lip: you masks
At operas and marriages,
Matriarchs with knobby canes,
Goodbye, goodbye gentlewomen.*

In the short space of five years, W. S. Merwin, born in 1927, has published three volumes of good size. It should not be registered against Mr. Merwin then that his third book, *Green With Beasts*, falls markedly below his earlier achievements. There is nothing in this book to equal or approach Mr. Merwin's two remarkable earlier poems, "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" and "Dictum: for a Masque of Deluge". On re-reading, these two excellent poems seem to have lost none of their strangeness and adequacy; their hallucinatory phrasing and rhythm is as effective as ever.

I must therefore venture to suggest, that like most poets much older than he, Mr. Merwin has been publishing too much; and that he should stop, take stock, and see where he is going. He is not improving his gift.

In general the current volume has an automatic, mechanical quality as if written in sleep; verbal somnambulism. This outpouring of language without consequence, wave after interminable wave of logorrhea, drowns the attention very soon; and the final impression of the book is one of boredom. Vacant, as if written in a trance, it is also harmless and unexceptionable, without impact. There is no sting. (Mr. Berryman is all sting; he is constantly stinging.) Every good writer makes mistakes, and for a young poet publishing a third volume so close on the heels of his first two, it is not unexpected. Mr. Merwin is in very distinguished company in this respect.

His ability is still there. Look for it in his "Two Horses", where the old hallucinatory magic reappears. There is much more to this poem than verbal ingenuity:

*Oh in whose grove have we wakened, the bees
Still droning under the carved wall, the fountain playing
Softly to itself, and the gold light, muted,
Moving long over the olives; and whose,
Stamping the shadowy grass at the end of the garden,
Are these two wild horses tethered improbably
To the withes of a young quince? No rider
Is to be seen; they bear neither saddle nor bridle;
Their brute hooves splash the knee-high green
Without sound, and their flexed tails like flags float . . .*

There is nothing else quite so good as this in the rest of the volume. But I recommend his effective sonnet "The Wilderness", the elusive "Thorn Leaves in March", "The Fishermen", "Senility Cay", and the mysterious "Voyage to Labrador". In all of these the persistence of a poet of rare faculties is unquestionably indicated.

With Edgar Bowers' *The Form of Loss* we come right up against a poet who has something to say; it is a first volume. Merwin's first book was equally alive, and he has written better poems, certainly, than Bowers has written as yet. The second and third volumes seem to be the danger for young poets of talent.

Bowers' book has life; it is measured also, and stately and dignified. The poet's maturity of vision and attitude is remarkable. There are excellent poems here: "The Wise Men", for its exactitude and revelation; "To Accompany an Italian Guide-Book" for its calm, graceful notation; the tranquil strength and spacious diction of "Palm Sunday". His "Elegy for W. C. S. H." is majestic and moving; its conclusion concentrates great force, intensity of expression, and control of language in words miraculously well chosen:

*Until the brain, achieving what is lost,
Assumes the living stone's integrity
And fluid sameness, line by elusive line
Of bitter, phidian serenity.*

Mr. Bowers' linguistic powers are great, and he knows what poetry is. Take, for example, "Grove and Building", which is more subtle and rhythmical, less direct and overt than most of his work. These supple and flexible lines show what Bowers can do, and the direction he seems to be moving toward, away from his perhaps over-confident certitude:

*There, at that moment of arrest, you feel
Against the blood veiling the eyes' repose
The prudent sun, the blood red solar Rose,
Unshadowed being turning like a wheel.*

This is a promising first volume; and Mr. Bowers is a writer of talent and ability.

Here then are five new books of poetry, all worth reading and considering for their different virtues. Each of these poets is a skillful practitioner and each should be observed carefully in the future. The diversity of their techniques, interests and effects testifies to the virility and persistence of this difficult and unrewarding art in confused and unrewarding times. In each of these books there is wine mixed with the sawdust.

THOMAS BARBOUR

The Stuff of the Theatre

HERE is a group of plays offered "for a new theatre" and the posthumously published work of a dramatist whose theatre was new thirty-five years ago.¹ Like O'Neill, these later playwrights invite consideration outside the context of commercial theatre, if only by their apparent commitment to something other than the expectations of a mass audience. They have been introduced, as he was, by way of tributary and off-Broadway playhouses; but, though some have earned much admiration from responsible critics, none has yet burst O'Neill-like into the consciousness of an awed and astonished public. I doubt that any of them is likely to recreate that earlier explosion; and, if they do not, the fault will be in some measure their own and only partly attributable to the stubbornness of the theatre for which they write. The paradox of this judgment is that two of them, at least, Mr. Hivnor and Mr. Merrill, exhibit here, at a very early stage of their careers, a surer craftsmanship, a greater felicity of style, a more perceptive and engaging intelligence, and better taste than Eugene O'Neill ever showed in a lifetime of playwriting.

The remaining three make somewhat less of an impression, though Lionel Abel promises more if he will advance in the direction tentatively proposed in *The Death of Odysseus*. I. A. Richards' *A Leak in the Universe* is a philosophical scherzo on a grave theme: a conjuror comes into possession of a box whose property is to make all objects placed into it literally and irrevocably disappear. He applies to a physicist, a medium, a professor of literature, and finally a Buddhist to elucidate its significance. The five short duologues that make up the text have the shape of a play, but they have not been dramatized; the frightening implications of the box, for example, are discussed but scarcely realized, and the characters have no existence apart from the ideas they are summoned to express. There is something here of interest and delight, when Dr. Richards' penetrating wit is not merely pedantic and his interspersed colloquialisms convey more than an affectation of congeniality; but it has almost nothing to do with the theatre. The scenes seem designed for presentation in a drawing room before an audience of academic sophisticates; and I gather that under just some such circumstances they were indeed first performed.

Twilight Crane, translated by A. C. Scott from the Japanese of Junji Kinoshita, has the opposite appeal of simplicity and naiveté. It is a parable

¹PLAYBOOK: FIVE PLAYS FOR A NEW THEATRE, containing: THE DEATH OF ODYSSEUS, by Lionel Abel; THE TICKLISH ACROBAT, by Robert Hivnor; TWILIGHT CRANE, by Junji Kinoshita; THE IMMORTAL HUSBAND, by James Merrill; A LEAK IN THE UNIVERSE, by I. A. Richards. New Directions. \$3.75.

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, by Eugene O'Neill. Yale University Press. \$3.75.

of greed in the form of a folk tale, suggesting many counterparts among Western fairy stories: a peasant's wife weaves a miraculous cloth and is turned into a crane when her husband is persuaded to probe the secret of its manufacture. It is a genuine theatre piece, affording a kind of fragile charm that would be more impressive if it did not seem to be the almost inevitable quality of such fables. Mr. Kinoshita has avoided whatever temptation there may have been to make his story either cute or jazzy, less of a feat perhaps in a civilization still more at ease than ours in its folkways; but, apart from this, his achievement seems, if hardly trivial, certainly slight. Except as an exercise for directors in what might be called "stylized realism" or as an example of how another culture manages to cork old wine in somewhat new bottles, *Twilight Crane* strikes me as having relatively little significance for a modern American theatre.

Dr. Richards' intellectual divertissement and Mr. Kinoshita's folk play are at least successful to the extent that they fulfill the very narrow limits of their authors' intentions; Mr. Abel's account of the decisions leading to Odysseus' death at the hands of his and Circe's son, Telegonus, is a comparative failure, though a far more interesting play, in that it seems but a sketch for a much more ambitious canvas. There is material in *The Death of Odysseus* for a long one-acter, if not a full-length play; what we are given, however, is a very short piece that is scarcely enough to illuminate the pertinent events and crucial deliberations of its hero's final moments. Odysseus emerges, to Mr. Abel's credit, as an interesting, indeed a charming, figure, and yet he fails to be dramatically quite engaging. His final acceptance of a way of death so completely at odds with his previous way of life is prettily stated in the last speech of the play, but the conclusion seems to have been achieved too casually to be as moving as it should be. We might suspect Mr. Abel of being insufficiently clear; but a rereading absolves him of any such charge. Everything is there that we need to understand the situation; the only thing lacking is that degree of emphasis wherein lies the difference between making a point and simply recording one. Mr. Abel's fault, I think, is not so much a question of language, which is for him an efficient instrument, as it is a matter of timing: his words outrun their sentiments, and we are hurried to a denouement that we are prepared intellectually, but not emotionally, to accept. He may have been afraid of padding his play; if so, he has mistaken as superfluous the weight that he must add to make a truly effective impact.

Robert Hivnor's *The Ticklish Acrobat* and James Merrill's *The Immortal Husband* are, on the other hand, fully developed scripts. As the physical culturists would say, they have bulk as well as definition. My own preference is for the first: Mr. Hivnor displays a fine satiric mind and an original, not to say fantastical, imagination. *The Ticklish Acrobat* is, before anything else, wonderfully funny.

It is serious, too: first, in the way that any successful satire (in this case, about Americans in Europe) is essentially serious, and secondly, in that it is also a poem about the limits of man's independence, his commitment to the past, and his obligation to his heart—a poem that is, inciden-

tally, partly in very supple and efficient verse. Mr. Hivnor invites us to consider the case of Bassett Pratt, an archeologist and self-styled free-thinker, assigned the task of excavating a remote Dalmatian village; and his story, as it unfolds, reflects Pratt's disclosures of the town of Pomo's past—the decorative folk community beneath the drab modern town, the fortress under that, and the temple at the last—so that the prevailing imagery of speech and action reveals the artist at the first level, the combatant at the second, and the communicant at the third: exposition, conflict, resolution. Pratt, in the spirit of ruthless inquiry, would go beyond the temple, but he is thwarted, having seduced the town's American Lady Bountiful, Ellie Sprockett, come fresh and amenable from a Dionysian revel. The romance of a third American, Joe Zanelli, and Anna Zugo, the daughter of a local family of acrobats, flourishes during the same festival. Pratt must accept as "a solution of sorts" what is fruition for the more open-hearted and unsophisticated Zanelli. The temple is acknowledged and allowed to stand, and a pair of marriages ends the play.

It occurs to me that, in making this very sketchy outline of *The Ticklish Acrobat*, I have tended to place the story of Pratt and Ellie Sprockett at its center, while the title of the play as well as the distribution of its emphasis suggests that the relationship of Joe Zanelli to his Anna, who is the ticklish acrobat, was intended to have equal, if not paramount, importance. This deflection of my attention, I believe, points to the problem at the core of Mr. Hivnor's comedy, which keeps it perhaps from being completely satisfying. Particularly as it involves Joe and Anna, the action of *The Ticklish Acrobat* may be described as metaphoric rather than literal. Now, Pratt and Miss Sprockett stand somewhat apart from the play's essential metaphor, although their story has reference to it, serving, as it were, as a sort of commentary upon it; their behavior, then, can be understood largely in terms of their own characters and of the literal situation in which they find themselves. Ellie's final receptivity, for example, and the breakdown of her puritan reserve on the night of the festival can be accounted for as the natural outcome of her elation under especially uninhibiting circumstances quite as readily as it may be interpreted as the mystical consequence of her having participated in a fertility rite. By the same token, Pratt's discovery of the impulsive creature within himself has as much to do with his ultimate acquiescence as has his revelation of the irrational substratum—of earthly love or religious dedication—underlying human society, the pagan temple under Pomo. Thus, whatever Mr. Hivnor's intention, Miss Sprockett and her archeologist come into sharpest focus since, though their characters are undoubtedly colored by the play's symbolism, he has endowed them first of all with a compelling fundamental reality.

Joe Zanelli, too, is real enough, but his participation in his share of the plot is mainly passive. His goal is quite simple: to marry Anna. In order to accomplish it, her family must give its consent, and Anna herself must get over her ticklishness, which renders any intimacy with Joe hilariously impossible. At the end, the Zugo family's opposition is withdrawn, and

Joe has abundant proof that Anna's ticklishness is cured (though it is difficult to tell from the timing of the play just when he had the opportunity to make, as apparently he did, the conclusive test of Miss Zugo's charms); but Zanelli has no part in bringing about these changes except when he is dragooned into playing the, certainly passive, role of the scapegoat in the fertility ceremony. The operative characters in the Zanelli story are the members of the Zugo family; and about their characters, their motives, and their decisions all manner of questions are invited. How are we to interpret their inexpertness as acrobats, which is temporarily overcome after the first excavation of Pomo? How should we account for Father Zugo's opposition to Joe, which culminates with his entrance, carrying "a large impractical sword", in the fortress scene? And how should we understand the final reconciliation after the ceremony, which not only allows Joe to marry Anna but admits him to membership in the acrobatic troupe: has Joe or have the Zugos or have both parties been transformed by that ritual?—and, if so, how? Above all, what significance are we to read into Anna's ticklishness: is it timidity or irresponsibility or merely indifference that make her laugh at her art, at Love, at Death? The point is not that these questions are unanswerable, but that they can be answered only in terms of Mr. Hivnor's metaphor. The critical characters, then, have not the support of a recognizable reality and must share the fate of purely symbolic figures: all of them, and Anna especially, remain strangely faceless.

As I have suggested, however, the saving grace of *The Ticklish Acrobat* is its author's sense of humor. If we are unable or unwilling to pursue Mr. Hivnor's more elusive characters into the remoter areas of meaning, we are left with a play that has an almost surrealistic surface quality, disturbing but nonetheless delightful. If Anna's ticklishness is taken as nothing more than ticklishness, her giggles, though they seem puzzlingly inane, are still infectious. And, stripped of its deeper connotations, the festival of the third act—with Joe playing the King of the Feast in his baseball uniform—remains a highly amusing conception. I have only to remark upon Mr. Hivnor's fine stage sense, which has made his gaiety so eminently viable in production, and to call confidently upon those too few fellow fortunates who saw the play produced off-Broadway in 1954 for their corroboration.

To prefer *The Ticklish Acrobat* is not entirely to deprecate James Merrill's retelling of the myth of Tithonus and Aurora in *The Immortal Husband*. It is a well-wrought theatre piece, fluent, polished, sensitive, very amusing at times, and thoroughly stageworthy as was demonstrated by its fine production at the Theater de Lys in 1955. It has all the virtues of literacy and intelligence that we rightly complain are lacking in the run-of-the-mill commercial products of Broadway, and yet somehow it seems a rather pallid, bloodless exercise.

Mr. Merrill has chosen to introduce Tithonus in England in 1854, on the day the dawn goddess has secured for the young man the gift of immortality, having neglected, however, to gain for him eternal youth; his

second act is set in Russia, 1894, with Aurora, about to become a mother, still relishing her "human adventure" and Tithonus, approaching sixty, bored and listless and unable to appreciate any experience; the final act discovers Aurora in present day America, preparing to desert her addled and garrulous centenarian of a husband. The characters other than Tithonus and Aurora turn up in each act in different guises, though in similar roles; they include a sort of anti-Tithonus in the Gardener/Konstantin/Mark, a robust lover of life and advocate of seizing the day and letting the future take care of itself, and an anti-Aurora in Mrs. Mallow/Olga/the Nurse, moving in shadow as the goddess moves in light, for whom the meaning of life is implicit in the condition of mortality. The "plot" of *The Immortal Husband* details the eventual restoration of the alignment that Aurora's ungodlike and Tithonus' inhuman ambitions have disturbed. Her experiment in mortality and his in immortality fail. At last she escapes with Mark, and Tithonus is left in the care of the Nurse, babbling the platitudes he inherited from his father and passed on to his son. We can appreciate the justice of this melancholy comedy and give assent to Mr. Merrill's wisdom; but, for my part, I find that, even as I say, "How true!", I am murmuring irreverently to myself, "So what?"

One difficulty is that there is little in the substance of Mr. Merrill's play to arouse our concern. Aurora is indeed depicted as an intriguing, if brainless, creature; but I submit that the problems of a goddess are not calculated to invite much sympathy from us earthlings. It is difficult to become upset about the mistakes of someone who has all eternity in which to correct them. It is something more terrible to contemplate the situation of one who has all eternity in which to pay for his mistakes, though, given the deterioration of Tithonus at 119 and imagining his state in the very near future, we can assume his finding solace in the death of the mind while others are left to fret about his bodily needs. Whatever may be the fate of Mr. Merrill's Tithonus, I am afraid it must lay a heavy strain upon our charity—at least, upon mine; for, regrettably, his hero is presented in his youth, when he still claims attention as a free agent, as an exceedingly petulant, disagreeable, and uninteresting boy, not greatly to be preferred to the sterile middle-aged man and the senile cipher he is to become.

Apart from the unsympathetic character of its principals, it seems to me there is a more important reason in the nature of the story itself why *The Immortal Husband* is not quite the successful play it might have been. It is, very simply, this: once we are told that Tithonus is to live eternally without eternal youth, nothing consequent to that decree can be shown on stage more awful than we can imagine. Mr. Merrill's only hope to surprise us is to show that Aurora's clumsy gift had, in point of fact, no significant consequence, that Tithonus' life was to be as pointless as it would have been had the gift never been made. This is the course the playwright takes, and he is left with the cheerless task of having to interest us with the delineation of a life whose foremost characteristic is that it is totally uninteresting. Actually the climax of Tithonus' career is the an-

nouncement of the gods' decree or, rather, his awareness of its implications. (Aurora's desertion may be a significant event, but not for him, since he is past being able to appreciate its significance.) Eternal decrepitude is the ironic penalty for his fear of death, which Mr. Merrill exposes as really a fear of life; once the sentence has been passed and acknowledged, all that is left is denouement. Mr. Merrill is stuck with a two-act anti-climax, since he has chosen to tell us all we need to know of Tithonus in his first act, concluding it with the crucial annunciation and his hero-victim's recognition of his fate: "Think what I'll be in—Oh God, less than a hundred years! A horrible old man, drooling, deaf!" Well, that is what he becomes. Meanwhile, there is no point dwelling upon the subject; it is to be brought up again only in wry, inadvertent, hastily suppressed jokes. Tithonus' anguished cry is all the bang we require and all we get: the rest of the play is perforce but a nicely articulated whimper.

The common quality I detect in all the offerings of *Playbook*—with the possible, but by no means certain, exception of *Twilight Crane*—is reticence. This is a collection of plays that purport to deal with such matters as love and life and death and with man's responsibilities to himself, his neighbors, and his gods. These are subjects that have engaged and forever will engage the attentions of all artists, indeed of all thoughtful men. They may have called forth in the past and undoubtedly will continue to provoke as much sentimental pap as genuine emotion, as much sententiousness as wisdom; but still there is no reason whatever to feel apologetic for bringing them up. And yet I observe that over these plays hangs a curious and disturbing atmosphere of apology. What retreats! what pussy-footings have we here! Dr. Richards takes refuge in a classroom joke; Mr. Abel dares not expand what is little more than the outline of a play; Mr. Hivnor, for all the ebullience of his humor, escapes into symbolism when he approaches the heart of his comedy; and Mr. Merrill sets his characters to chattering elegantly around the issue. Mr. Kinoshita has chosen a smaller point to make, but at least he alone approaches it with relative boldness; he has, however, assumed the protective coloration of a fairy tale, which is generally acceptable as an excuse for such candor. What I am asking for is that these playwrights support their intellectual assurance that they have something valuable to say with something more like passionate conviction. After a surfeit of witty circumlocutions, knowing smiles, and politely ironic rejoinders, I begin to long for the aggression of a direct statement, the release of a belly-laugh, the excitement of a scream. This kind of emphasis, of punctuation, is more especially pertinent to the theatre than to any other literary form; for the theatre is more of a public revelation than a private confidence, and its nature is to prefer the immediate impact of representing the event itself to the quieter consideration of it in reflection and discussion after the fact. It would be, of course, as wrong as it would be absurd to ask that the theatre emulate exclusively the fury of the bear-pit; but, nevertheless, I think there is some cause for alarm that not one of these playwrights "for a new theatre" has felt for a moment the urge to raise his voice.

The late Eugene O'Neill had many faults, but reticence was never one of them. Certainly nobody can complain of his reserve in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. To say that this candidly autobiographical play is, as I believe it is, one of his better ones would not be over-complimentary in the eyes of his most energetic detractors. Though it has not all the badness of some of O'Neill, it still has much of the badness of all of O'Neill. It exhibits nothing of the awkward over-plotting, the abortive experiments in form, or the sophomoric psychologizing that he has so often inflicted upon us. Yet it is far, far too long. And windiness with O'Neill is no mere superficial blemish, but, as I take it, the manifestation of a radical and unignorable deficiency. In his case, it seems a sign, not of his having too much to say, but of his not knowing quite what to say or how to say it. No less here than elsewhere, his work bears witness to an implicit tragedy more poignant than any he ever set out to write, the tragedy of one who had the dedicated ambition of an artist of the foremost rank coupled with the expressive powers of a none-too-precocious schoolboy. It rather looks as though he sought to make up for this defect by using a sort of verbal blunderbuss, hoping to bring down with many scattered shots the quarry he could not kill with a single, well-directed shaft. And how many shots in *Long Day's Journey* miss the mark! The play is a truly formidable compendium of outrageous clichés, of poetry that would soar on eagle wings but remains as earthbound as the lumbering dodo, of tough-guy talk as stale, flat, phony, and incredibly naive as any I used to read in my teaching days in the effusions of adolescents celebrating their new-found right to be "daringly frank."

It is hard to escape the impression that O'Neill's eloquence was so distressingly inhibited largely by his bewilderment in the midst of anguish. His intellectual strength was never prepossessing, yet he had the sensitivity of a naked nerve, a pain threshold of zero. He could not really diagnose and certainly could not resolve his agony, but he could cry out forcefully and keep crying till sheer exhaustion brought him something like relief. When he comes to consider the melancholy lot of the Tyrones—whom we know to be the O'Neills—in *Long Day's Journey*, he can only rehearse over and over again the facts of their situation, but he can shed little light upon it. Since, search as he will, he can find no expression of a meaningful pattern of life to which he might relate his and his family's problem, we are obliged to assume that he regarded life as essentially meaningless and chaotic. This implicitly nihilistic view may tell the sorry truth, but it does not account for the Tyrones' clinging to a life that so utterly defeated them or for their younger son's going on to write plays that could serve no ultimate purpose but the private one of giving vent to his own bitterness. Such compassion as he communicates for the "four haunted Tyrones" is but the recognition that they are all the equally wretched and, in the last analysis, equally blameless victims of an inconsiderate and inscrutable fate—an attitude that bespeaks pity without real understanding and fails to dignify its objects as moral beings with a responsible share in their destiny. He leaves them in the communion only of despair, not so much refined by their suffering as, simply, numbed by it.

Though, as literature or philosophy, *Long Day's Journey* is crude, murky, and exasperating, it still has, as a piece for the theatre, its element of greatness. It is not surprising that Eugene O'Neill devoted his creative energies so exclusively to writing for the stage; for the theatre, as I have remarked, seems expressly designed to provide an outlet for his one considerable talent, his ability to communicate emotion. Unlike the contributors to *Playbook*, O'Neill was never ashamed or afraid of passion; what is more, he was happily endowed with a skill for delineating situations that justified its expression so that his work at its best, as in the present instance, rises impressively above the level of mere melodrama and soap opera. It is regrettable that this capacity of his could not have been reinforced by a felicitous command of language, but it is not utterly vitiated by the absence of that highly desirable support. A good actor can divert our attention from the speech itself to the emotions it indicates; and, if these be significant, consistent, and believable, however woefully inadequate may be the words on the Tyrones' lips, the sorrows and rages in their hearts can be nonetheless powerfully compelling.

The current production of *Long Day's Journey* at the Helen Hayes Theatre fortunately has some very good actors on board and, in José Quintero, a director peculiarly sensitive to O'Neill's theatrical potentialities. Only Florence Eldridge seems to me unequal to the playwright's assignment, which, in the case of Mary Tyrone, is indeed a tough one. In a family of repetitious complainers, she is the most repetitious and plaintive. Lost as she is in her drug-induced reveries of the past, she is always evasive, always "play-acting"; as the character least in touch with reality, she is the most difficult to make real. Miss Eldridge, I think, takes the wrong tack by playing Mary Tyrone's drug addiction too much too early, giving an unwelcome emphasis to the artificiality of the role and leaving her with nowhere to go at her final entrance, presumably now on the brink of complete narcosis, except into a rather incredible imitation of the somnambulant Lady Macbeth. Moreover, though she uses her body with astounding fluency, she rarely varies her vocal pattern from a somewhat saccharine sing-song. As a result, one begins to count with increasing painfulness the number of times Mrs. Tyrone is required to mention "barrooms and cheap hotels" (always that adjective with that noun) and to whimper that she never had a home. The pathetic character that O'Neill intended becomes something of a shrew and very much of a bore. Bradford Dillman and Jason Robards, Jr., cope with their chores more successfully, the latter offering an especially fine bit of bravura playing in his final drunk scene. They manage, for the most part, to get around the difficulty of having to talk of "John Barleycorn", "booze", and "dope-fiends" by kidding such improbable expressions as they pronounce them; the alcohol they are supposed to have consumed helps them to do this. Mr. Dillman, correctly I believe, is not overly impressed by the cumbersome poetic speeches he must deliver as Edmund Tyrone (*i. e.*, Eugene O'Neill); his attack lends special validity and poignancy to his confession, "Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people."

Frederic March seems the happiest of all in his part, and certainly James Tyrone, Sr., is far and away the best portrait in O'Neill's family group. He is also—and there is no harm in it—the most phlegmatic of the principals. I suspect that Mr. March manages to escape his worst lines by converting them into mumbles; but, whatever he does, he grunts in character. His interpretation is multi-dimensional, richly varied, full-blooded, and truly superb; father Tyrone, for all his selfishness and niggardliness, emerges as a creature of affecting warmth and dignity with a humor that may barely be suspected in the script but seems exactly right in the performance.

Production realizes the virtues of the written play, but it does not completely obliterate its deficiencies. Cutting is still very much in order: too many beats drag on beyond their effectiveness. And yet, while they last, the effects are surely telling. The crippled beggar displaying his stumps in the street is a graceless, indeed almost indecent creature. We can feel no admiration for him; the sight of him makes us none the wiser. Yet the wounds are there for us to see, and they are real and horrible and unforgettable. I feel rather the same way about *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. It is very far from a perfect play, but the stuff of the theatre is in it. The authors of *Playbook* had better learn what that is if they want to justify their editor's claims for them.

BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Agonists and Agonizers, and a Utopian¹

NOVELISTS FALL INTO two categories these days, according to the way they respond to the shortage of decent gods and contests. There is the man who accepts the shortage as a fact among facts, there is the man who considers that his duty is to relieve it. The latter, when literate, reminds himself that even the masters invented gods and made sin offerings—to the Faubourg, the seaman's code, the True Hearth (D. H. Lawrence, Novelist). He thinks of Forster bowing to order and empire as late as the 1920's and of Fitzgerald honoring work and success a full decade later; he remembers how much one seemed to care whether Swann defeated the Verdurins, how exciting the world was when it hounded Heyst for outraging the captains and navigators and hotelmen—all those priests at sea. Happy in such memories, possibly swelling a little with self-importance, he cries up

¹THE FALL, by *Albert Camus*. Knopf. \$3.00. THE LOST STEPS, by *Alejo Carpentier*. Knopf. \$3.75. BROTHERS AND SISTERS, by *Ivy Compton-Burnett*. Zero Press. \$3.75. GO IN BEAUTY, by *William Eastlake*. Harper. \$3.50. TILL WE HAVE FACES, by *C. S. Lewis*. Harcourt, Brace. \$4.50. THE FIELD OF VISION, by *Wright Morris*. Harcourt, Brace. \$3.50. THE FOUNTAIN OVERFLOWS, by *Rebecca West*. Viking. \$5.00. ANGLO-SAXON ATTITUDES, by *Angus Wilson*. Viking. \$4.50.

the idea of a story, arguing that new struggles, new idols of price and value, can be discovered. Meantime his brother, a dourer type, is content to ask: Surely that was before the Flood? Marvelous how the old breed went on inventing plausible shrines and cleansing sacrifices, but the plain meaning of the effort was: This is an Invention. Are we nowadays to make ourselves specialists in the dead art of agonistics, or are we to observe what *is*?

The argument is not the kind that needs settling. When we accept a choice in terms so abstract we agree, in effect, to mourn the death of the novel with whatever midwestern intelligence is the latest to announce that event. The task is, as always, to find out how much one can believe on either side, what sorts of flummery one feels obliged to resist. Probably C. S. Lewis' sort will vex only the very stiff. Among the old guard of the university a taste for Lewis on the Christian mysteries is common—I remember a distinguished scholar explaining the lightness of touch that we call English by adducing, as comic lights, the Lewis of the *Screwtape Letters* and Nancy Mitford—and the weekly reviews indicate that this latest piece has found its audience. Given a situation in which new gods and new shrines are hard to come by, Lewis recovers the old ones. He writes of pagan sacrifice, of Psyche's difficult discovery of the meaning of trial and redemption, and stitches the whole so cleverly that we think about the Crucifixion in part one and about Eden in part two.

If we had to think of nothing else there would be no embarrassment. Lewis lacks the power of creating person or place, but he is ingenious at legendry, and deserves praise for his modesty in remaking an allegory of love without emphasizing that this is his area of special competence. But alas we do think of something else. We think of the puckish don sitting on Eliot's knee in the alert posture of the dummy, and remembering Lewis' taunts of the master over the years, we are amused. The lady narrator of *Till We Have Faces* is one of those who recount miracles as they looked to contemporaries—that is, with rough honesty and painful doubt; her intention is to prune and chasten the miracle with skeptical understanding. By name she is Orual, Princess of Glome; in fact she is the speaking magus or the one who was read to by a boy. Her voice and her rhetoric from beginning to end—the scrupulous parentheses, the weighty paradoxes, the effortful flatness—were invented by the aged eagle:

Since I write this book against the gods, it is just that I should put into it whatever can be said against myself. So let me set this down: as she spoke, I felt, amid all my love, a bitterness. Though the things she was saying gave her (that was plain enough) courage and comfort, I grudged her that courage and comfort. It was as if someone or something else had come in between us. If this grudging is the sin for which the gods hate me, it is one I have committed.

(List of particular echoes elsewhere on request.) In another kind of book—I cannot offhand describe it—the complication of tone that results might not be bothersome. But when the writer's only conceivable purpose is to

express a fresh skeptical understanding, it is disappointing to find him gagging on someone else's voice: the primitive truths ought to be farther from us than *Prufrock and Other Observations*. I am not sound enough on the don's oeuvre to be certain that *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* is his youngest book, but I do know that turning from that work to *Till We Have Faces*, whose only fit reader would appear to be the doting sport, is a puzzling experience.

Despite their relative youth, the gods appealed to by Rebecca West and Angus Wilson are not so much less stale than Lewis' gods. Wilson is a genuine novelist, one who studies his people conscientiously and sustains his illusion easily—how many such writers are there? You have only to read one or two of his pages to sense that he would be bored by the woolly-bear sentimentality of *The Fountain Overflows*, that he would chuckle at the idea of using a feckless and fearless journalist as a hero. Wilson knows darkness in many forms—spivs, perverts, American graduate students, liberal industrialists. Miss West only knows that grave choices confront the young artist (whether to sacrifice one's art to motherhood, whether to be serious or commercial), and that bad men prey on fearless writers. Yet it isn't entirely unfair to set Wilson's latest beside *The Fountain Overflows*: both books inform us about the same world—the world of inviolable public standards, incorruptible public gods.

Wilson's Incorruptible is Historical Scholarship. His aging hero, an historian named Middleton, is aware that a pagan image found in the tomb of a seventh century bishop was put there by a prankster, yet he declines for thirty years to publish the truth. His silence testifies to his estrangement from the academic community and from the high discipline of Clio, a Muse. But it ends, and the ease of the ending offers a key to the unreality of the book. Doubtless Wilson knows that that discipline is no comfortable womb whose representatives speak in the same breath of Rowse and Namier and lay it on soberly that Toynbee "bestrides forty centuries." Although he cannot make us feel the pressure of a sensitive scholar's awareness of uncertainties in the relation between the public world of the Fifties and the quality of the editing of an obscure learned journal, he does "sketch the problem." One feels, however, that these problems are abstract, temporary—strengthen sterling a trifle and they will vanish. The *Times* and the *Guardian* still send men to cover meetings of historical researchers. Gracious Sir Edgars still say: "Ah my dear fellow, we pursue humane studies, we're not technicians. All this spectrographic analysis, fluorine tests and what-not. There's no place for 'sweetness and light' in all that." Isn't it possible, then, that the center of the world could be a sixty year old ex-don quarreling abstractly with himself about whether to have a "moment of truth" that will "upset the balance of the English historical profession?"

As many have said, Wilson has a Plot and a Broad Canvas; he observes the social scene and makes amusing critical remarks. But in the end his lances break off too close to the wrist—a way of saying that the problems of his chief characters seem trumped-up. When Middleton asks whether

his silence about the forged image "was really a serious matter," we recognize this as a sort of mechanical waving in our direction; the question draws up no acute sense of personal quandary: the man is only asking. After a read and a nap and a long listen to the various inanities of his family, the answer comes. He returns—to edit *History*, to make "good use of the young men," to talk firmly of responsible scholarship and to tender a resignation on the ground that his own scholarship was once irresponsible, to see the resignation rejected, and to have Sir Edgar assert at the end that only someone who hardly knew dear Middleton could say that he "had taken life a bit too easily."

Now of course to say that Wilson himself takes life too easily is to lay oneself open to the charge of being insensitive to the lightness of touch that we call English. The risk can be borne. And confidently, for none will persist in the argument that Wilson's assumptions—that Truth is located in that cabinet, that a gentleman will do the one right thing if he sits down with himself and reflects, that the rationale of snobbery can rise above utilitarianism—are the kind that make for lightness. Blessings on you, *Lucky Jim*, for dumping that bulky English freight. This is not the moment to pontificate about Amis as the *farceur* of a dark world, but plainly he did leave the preservation of values to others. In the thin dry air of the new wilderness, which shall we value more, History or Hilarity? Setting this un-Wilsonian question, and imagining that he knew the answer, Amis had the exhilaration of feeling himself the only man in England who was free of cant (in his reviews lately, if not in the second novel, he maintains his euphoria). Writers who work with more decent principles (the impulse to do so has become English again) seem unable to realize either dislocation or harmony; what they offer is tedium.

Or, worse, obvious self-delusion. There is something of that in Wilson's book and clearer signs of it abound elsewhere. Unforgivable to change subjects so abruptly but—where else save in England do intellectuals receive commonplaces like those of *The Outsider* as stop press news? We have lately heard Mr. G. S. Fraser of the *New Statesman* explain that the American bard, unlike the English, is no longer able to imagine that his art will help him to become Somebody. I have supped with princes myself, says Mr. Fraser shyly. (Has he been dancing three times with Princess Margaret? A friend of mine from Jersey—New, that is—whose nickname is Sabu has done *that*.) Mr. Fraser is the poet who, in a little book called *Postwar Trends in English Literature* (1956: The Hokuseido Press), offered notes on topography and etiquette to whatever Japanese might want to come around and "make some contact with the London literary world." Try the Gloucester Road area, the book suggests: "In these flats one sometimes finds colonies of young men, writers and students, sharing expenses and housework, and leading a gay, picnicking bachelor existence." Advice on dress follows (tweed jacket, please, flannel trousers, self-colored shirt and tie), and picturesque taverns are recommended ("The atmosphere here will be cosmopolitan"). Then some frank advice on manners—still the basic English export: "One must learn both to

listen intelligently and to put one's own pertinent word in when it is needed." And at last (one felt it lurking cheerfully all the while): "English writers are much more fully and healthily integrated into the society to which they belong. Thus M. Sartre's type of existentialism, which is essentially an expression of the individual's feeling of not belonging anywhere, has never really caught on in contemporary England." Dr. Comfort's complaint about the lack of coherent groups in our society is really too absurd. Why, in "one pub in Oxford Street quite a regular event used to be a competition at darts between a team of uniformed postmen and a team of longhaired poets."

An important instinct of the Victorian sahib was that for appealing to the native's sense of self-contempt while hiding his own: it is not necessarily the most attractive of the items in the Heritage, that might have been preserved, nor is it indispensable to the complete literary intelligence. This isn't to say that complacency is universal in "the London literary world:" the tone of the *New Statesman* and the *London Magazine* is well cut by *Twentieth Century* and *Encounter*. Neither is it to say, returning to the case at hand, that Angus Wilson's mind is indistinguishable from that of G. S. Fraser. The point is simply that certain English writers make an empty sound these days, speak with chirpy obliviousness that one prefers to avoid if one can.

The immediate alternative that is offered is Camus, whose new book, a philosophical novel cast in the form of a confession, explores what is called the modern conscience. In a voice by turns leisurely and intense, a Parisian barrister gives an account of the events and the meditation that led him to take up his present "career" as judge-penitent in a low Amsterdam cafe. The sources and implications of the guilt thus exposed have been handsomely discussed by R. G. Davis in a *Times* review that was a model of its kind, and Davis and others directed attention to the way in which allusion to Dante as well as to Biblical legend complicates Camus' meaning. Things move so quickly these days—I think of the Princeton seminars in existentialism for returning alumni—that *The Myth of Sisyphus* is probably already an unmentionable subject, but even so it ought to be said that *The Fall* is a rich book when read with that piece in mind. The barrister Jean-Baptiste Clamence describes his first role—that of the figure of public virtue, the master who is "altogether in harmony with life," admired by women, colleagues, and clients—in terms that reveal him to be the reconciled man whom Camus had at in *Sisyphus*. The role in question cannot be played long by anyone of intelligence, and at length Clamence hears laughter and begins to emerge as a person sufficiently remote from his own life to take a wide view of it. The step "involves the principle of liberation," as Camus said in *Sisyphus*, but Clamence, incapable of becoming an absurd man, can go no farther. He does not want to be free and condemned, he wishes still to avoid judgment, to remain on the summit; he will not accept Sisyphus' burden—awareness that the universe can afford no master. Despising himself, hoping to silence the laughter, he teaches the world to despise itself, and achieves only the peculiar nothingness of misanthropy.

As goes almost without saying, *The Fall* is more abstract than Camus' other novels, and readers unsympathetic to the novel of ideas will not respond to it enthusiastically. The writer takes pleasure in the shrewd manipulation of an argument, and feels no obligation to engage anyone with a drama. But there *is* much to admire. "When one has no character, one *has* to have a method"—the appreciation of such a sentence does not even demand a suspension of francophobia. And people who have no phobia to suspend, and who are willing to bring to bear a minimum knowledge of related books, will find *The Fall* to be that very uncommon production—a work about which it is possible to think.

That is higher praise, I fear, than can be given to Carpentier, Morris, and Eastlake, even though these writers are far more present than some. The problem (one wonders whether Camus himself will be able to solve it again) is that of finding a way to be present without being dull. The notion that a man in flight ought to be pursued dies hard, after all, and there is a wearying sameness to heroes whose single desire is to define the bottom of life. Still, even when plunged and gravelled in the clichés of the writer who is trying to inhabit our world, one is thankful for the modesty of his hoaxes: at least he does not tell us that the Alsops are slaying the dragon for St. George. Eastlake and Morris give us figures who are sick of literature, Carpentier's hero is sick of music; Eastlake and Carpentier relax for a while in primitivism—Carpentier in the fluvial jungle of South America, Eastlake among the Navajo. Morris, striking a zany pose, lets his playwright make a god out of Ty Cobb's pocket. Eastlake is embarrassed into protective irony by the nature of the story he has to tell, and neither Carpentier nor Morris bothers to invent a story. Damning as this catalogue might appear, all three do more than help us pass the time.

One would not guess from the opening chapters of *Go In Beauty*, a first novel, that Eastlake has a fresh note. We begin with a *soi-disant* writer indulging in the coy ironies of (once more) the obtuse late Hemingway. The writer steals his brother's wife from a New Mexico ranch, has a success, contemplates Byronic exploits, and dies. Eastlake indicates by his tone that he has contempt for this line of his material, and he thereby functions as his best critic. What truly engages him is the way in which certain precociously sophisticated Indians (a white rancher has found names for them in *Burke's Peerage*) reckon with "contemporary civilization." I chuckle at Lady Blessington who gives up her pipe because of the cancer scare, and am amused at what happens to a German atomic physicist, leader of a sport car cavalcade that travels the desert, when he arrives at a Navajo center needing gas. A medicine man named Paracelsus makes magic by stringing rope about his shoulders and drenching him with gas. "Sometimes it is necessary to treat everyone," Paracelsus says with fine bland poise, as he waits for matches. "Evil is that kind of sickness." The pleasant grave wit Eastlake shows in his best moments, his chaste eschewal of opportunities for judgment, suggest that he has a comic gift to develop.

Morris' gifts in this and other directions might fit him for one of those wholly accidental successes that good writers now and then seem still to

have, were it not for his impatience with the story. In *The Field of Vision*, as in many of his books, what happens in the outer, on-going world—here *the* happening is a bullfight—does not become the center even of passing interest. To say this is only to say that Morris is a very indirect writer. In a weird case history and again in an account of a pilgrim lost in the Western desert he shows once more his bent for non-dramatic narrative, full of odd turnings and psychological invention. But its force is always descriptive. The writer is noticeably reluctant to come down to a scene; he hurries on from event to event, as if the weight of the proceedings were in the narrator's voice, not in the people and places described. When a scene can no longer be postponed, a veil of wryness visible stands between the reader and the figures so that the effect remains—indirect. Other writers, like cartographers journeying to a place they have known only as lines, often return to an early landscape, hoping now to bring the realizing imagination closer, to make the meaning of the place felt as a set of *stronger sensations than could be managed before. But that is not Morris' way.* The desolate western whistle stop that figured in *The Works of Love* (1952) and in earlier novels turns up again in *The Field of Vision*, but we are caught in a dimmer memory now, separated from the scene by an extra voice, a more recessive tense. And this movement away from the thing is altogether what one has come to expect.

Probably Morris' fascination is with voices, not with characters; probably he prefers mystery to revelation, tableau to drama. But to undervalue him on this account would be foolish: I love to listen to him; I love his wit and invention, even when the latter takes a Saroyanesque turn; I admire his refusal to accept the simplifying tactics of a conventional story. If Nebraska is less than an enveloping atmosphere in his books, it was nothing at all before he began to name it. And in one novel at least, *The Deep Sleep*, the indirectness that I complain of perhaps too pettishly seemed like that of high art.

Carpentier is also indirect, bare of scenes, strong on description, and somewhat putative in net effect. The center of his book is a musicologist's journey into South America in search of ritual maraccas and the like; the Laurentian bottom of his effort appears in such a passage as this: "The thing that impressed me most on this trip was the discovery that there were still great areas of the earth where people were immune to the ills of the day, and that here, even though many people were contented with a thatched roof, a water jug, a clay griddle, a hammock, and a guitar, a certain animism lived on in them, an awareness of ancient traditions, a living memory of certain myths" etc. Dreadful, of course, to read that. But elsewhere there is a compensating richness of sensation. This must be a remarkable translation; one could read a mountain of Stanley on the other continent, with or without Olivia Manning, and know less about jungles than Carpentier tells in a page. A page of sentences like the following, on a river sunk deep in the drenched world: "Under the water great riddled leaves waved like dominoes of ocher velvet, lures and traps." As I say, no

explanation of a flight from civilization is likely to be fresh nowadays, but there are reflections in this one—particularly on the new pornography—that almost earn Carpentier the right to say the more familiar things again.

Two kinds of novel, then. Old gods and no gods, contests and quitclaims, agonistics and agony—and little unalloyed delight in either. Is there something else? There is Miss Ivy Compton-Burnett. One puts down much of what one reads about this writer—whether a casual savaging between the perfume ads or the British Council pamphlet or Liddell's book or the solemn leaflet that the Zero Press includes with *Brothers and Sisters*—with the perhaps priggish feeling that that is not it, that is not it at all. On the one hand we hear of Compton-Burnett's tragic vision, her gallows-like mind, her "terrifying revelation of the savage heart," her fearless concentration on aberrancy and the worst sins. On the other we are told of Compton-Burnett's failure as a realist: children don't talk like that, people die in a sentence and the conversation continues without pause—how undramatic, how untruthful. It is possible that the Zero Press considers that criticism ought to start over again with this writer: it reissues her third novel with no word to indicate its age (Arnold Bennett praised it), and I notice the book has been reviewed as if it were new. In any case, there is a further word to be said about Compton-Burnett, and it may as well be said here.

It is that despite her frequent darkness there is still a sense in which even the author of *Elders and Betters* is a utopian writer, the creator of a world whose special excellence stands as a key to the nature of our own divergence from the standard. Not, of course, our divergence from the social texture of 1890: we all know the sort of person who, knowledgeable about the libraries at Battersea Rise but not about, say, Charles Tennyson's Bayons, speaks of the "established society" of Miss Compton-Burnett's books as if such a society had existed on earth, as if the writer's point were that there have been country houses with three in service on the second floor. The novelist is occasionally beguiled from her gift into the trivialities of social history, but by and large her art is pure. Pure in its pursuit of evil? Well, it is also absorbed in the task of describing a world where men take for granted that their best knowledge is knowledge of their own feelings and of those of others close to them; a world in which almost everyone understands that the highest good is Intimacy. Fancy such a world, Miss Compton-Burnett seems to say—what would it be like? People blessed with confidence in their perceptions would speak with the tongues of angels. The full terror of the other world would somehow be less terrifying: murder, incest, pain, death, suicide, perversion, cold fathers, dominating mothers, ambitious humbugs—all would have the sting pulled from them when faced by *connected* people. And there would be only one unpardonable sin, that of obtrusive self-sufficiency.

This last discovery—about sin—takes its place as a splendid instance of utopian invention. At precisely the moment when our special malady is, as Lawrence put it, that none of us can "bear connection," Miss Compton-

Burnett presents a world where only a rare one—an Anna Donne or an Aunt Mattie—can endure to remain *unconnected*. Often this villainous type is ashamed of his gift—as Horace is ashamed in *Manservant and Maid-servant*. Often the ambitious man has his public purpose defiled by the urgency of his private understanding—the case of Bigwell in *Two Worlds and Their Ways*. Usually the most hideous revelation is taken as the ground of fresh and wittier communion. Upon discovering that their parents' marriage was incestuous, the children in *Brothers and Sisters* reflect that such a turn might be thought to bring them—closer together? Elsewhere a father faced with perversion and deceit in his children says gently: "They are ours, Maria. They owe us life, and therefore we owe them everything."

It would be sentimental indeed to maintain that the savage heart is not dissected in the crises of these novels. And yet the recurring moment in them is that of harmony, communion, reconciliation. In their characteristic scene strangers meet and know each other's soul from a single remark. No bathetic outpouring of inner life follows, yet one feels the inner life proffered by both, accepted by both with bemused rueful pity; from this concord true wit upon the instant begins beautifully to flow. My notion, too baldly put, is that the pure evil in a Compton-Burnett novel is something of a trick, a mask—"Things in a fairy world always take on a different guise," says a character somewhere in one of the novels—serving to convince us the writer knows the facts whose opposite her utopia so brilliantly comes to exhibit. The strategy is not entirely unlike that of the writer who goes to heaven in Mozambique, but it spares us the vulgarity of the trip. Here is no native girl tumbling out of the bedroll to make us feel self-contempt, no burdensome thickness of dirt and flies to remind us how abstract we have become, no despairing gesture to assure us that there are others who know our darkest thoughts—not to say that the comfort of such a gesture is to be despised. Here instead is a wry intelligence that charms us with our possibilities even as it scourges us for our sins, offering us a quiet image of what we are not, flawing it with most marvelous ingenuity to remind us of what we are. I can imagine some stern soul granting this, and then going on to charge that that was not the intention, that Miss Compton-Burnett really cares no whit about saving us from dying of the truth. But in our present literary circumstances, as defined above, the saner course is to forget about intentions, and give thanks for a writer who, whatever her purposes, regularly has that effect.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

A Failed Prophet

A WORD ABOUT these four books.¹ *Homage to Catalonia* is, I think, much the best book Orwell wrote and is more than worth the money. His gifts as a reporter and social analyst could have found no more suitable material to work with, for he was able to use the microcosm of his own experience in the Spanish Civil War to comprehend the nature of that war—that war which was in turn a sort of microcosm of political struggle in our age, right against left and left against itself. Further, the book is an honest account of a soldier's experience in war and revolution, which is its own reward. The *Anchor Collection* contains fourteen essays on writers, England, personal experiences, words, popular culture, Gandhi. All the essays are good, and seem to have been selected for their tone of sociological earnestness; perhaps *Anchor* will be encouraged to issue another collection of Orwell's essays more various in matter, especially some of those on nature. *The Orwell Reader* (it should be *An Orwell Reader*) contains a journalistic, puffing introduction by Richard Rovere, seventeen essays (they are more representative than the *Anchor* selection), and "gems" from his full-length books both fiction and non-fiction. There are 140 pages or so of chapters from novels (including Chapter I from *1984*!), but nothing from *Animal Farm*, which seems to me the best fiction he wrote. There is this to be said for reading the chapters excerpted from *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, *Coming Up for Air*, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, and *Burmese Days*: together with Hollis's summaries, they discourage one from attempting the whole books; but this service, even with the seventeen essays, is not worth \$5.95. Hollis's critical study of Orwell's literary works, with a judicious minimum of biographical material, is intelligent, thorough and worthy in the manner of the memorials which the British compose to persons they have turned into monuments. It is hard not to accede to Hollis's judgments on Orwell's accomplishments, shortcomings, and influence in the world, and I am grateful for his summaries of Orwell's books; but he has the desiccating tone of a sensible man who has things well in hand, including the awareness that there are things he does not have well in hand; these latter, for the most part, he turns over to the Church to wrap up for him. Hollis's *Study* is certainly worth getting out of the library to read.²

¹HOMAGE TO CATALONIA, by *George Orwell*. Beacon. \$1.25. A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, by *George Orwell*. Anchor Books. \$.95. THE ORWELL READER. Harcourt, Brace. \$5.95. A STUDY OF GEORGE ORWELL, by *Christopher Hollis*. Regnery. \$3.75.

²The *Study* contains at least one serious error of fact (at the end of the summary of *Animal Farm*) and, according to Rayner Heppenstall's review in *The N. Y. Times Book Review*, a good many minor biographical errors. Also, Hollis quotes (p. 158) from book six of *Gulliver's Travels*, a journey to Severambia, and wonders why Orwell's edition included only the first four books. But this was a spurious sequel to *Gulliver*, published in 1727, much translated along with the original, still advertised in antiquarian catalogues, but taken seriously by no reasonably scholarly writer for generations, if ever.

Rereading Orwell, I was struck with the frequency and the vigor with which he strained against the rationalistic materialism he usually asserted. He was opposed in principle to Christianity as to all religion, yet he said that in losing Christianity we (i.e., he and his primary audience of Anglo-American liberals) lost incomparable riches. He attacked Swift for being opposed to scientific advance, the enlightenment, and social progress; yet he could also write ("Inside the Whale"): "Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles." He wrote that the popular loss of belief in personal immortality was the most important social phenomenon of the age. He made a wry and bitter joke that sometimes he could almost believe there was an order of things outside time and space. In *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) he wrote a phantasmagorical chapter in the form of a play, which includes, without irony or comedy, the following stage direction to the reader: "As he (a priest who is reciting the Lord's Prayer backward) reaches the first word of the prayer he tears the consecrated bread across. The blood runs out of it. There is a rolling sound, as of thunder, and the landscape changes. . . . Monstrous winged shapes of Demons and Archdemons are dimly visible, moving to and fro." Yet, despite the fame of *1984* and the enormous respect in which Orwell is held, I propose that he is a failed prophet.

One should, I think, realize that Gandhi's teachings cannot be squared with the belief that Man is the measure of all things and that our job is to make life worth living on this earth, which is the only earth we have. They make sense only on the assumption that God exists.

("Reflections on Gandhi")

Not that Orwell was, or claimed to be, a prophet in the full sense. A prophet is one who speaks poetically from divine inspiration, and Orwell was a prose atheist; furthermore, a prophet is one whose audience (and a prophet must have an audience) *believes* that he speaks from divine inspiration, and almost none of the Anglo-American audience to whom Orwell addressed himself will credit a man with speaking God's word. Orwell strove, at his best, to speak directly from his own conscious experience, and blunt prose is the proper instrument for such speech; a true prophet does not deal chiefly with the sorts of truth that fit into prose.

Of course, no honest person claims that happiness is *now* a normal condition among adult human beings; but perhaps it *could* be made, and it is upon this question that all serious political controversy really turns.

("Politics vs. Literature")

Yet he is a sort of prophet—at least he is viewed as one, the secular prophet of socialism. Secularism can have no analogues to saints, for good men, of whom Orwell was surely one, men who are splendidly virtuous, honorable, upright, courageous, honest, and concerned with *right* behavior, are not necessarily in a special connection with God as saints are; but it has its analogues to prophets, who speak, and are thought of as speaking, the truth, experienced and reasoned-upon moral

and political truth, the truth behind the shifting confusion and lies of events, the steady truth. Prophets do not systematize, are no theologians, no philosophers even; Orwell sticks to his experience as faithfully as any Jeremiah to the word of God, and if it leads him into anti-socialistic or self-contradictory statements he is unconcerned, as are we. Prophets use satire as one of their scourges, and Orwell is excellent at satire; indeed, had he been more systematizing and inventive, like his admired Swift, he might have composed satires of a high order; but his chief satire, *Animal Farm*, sticks to (is stuck with) the political facts too nearly. Prophets tell the people, especially the mighty and chosen, what they ought to have done and ought to do, and boldly promise actual punishments for their transgressions and dreamlike rewards for their obedience to the right; all this Orwell does. Prophets want you to hear the word, not their delivery of it; in Orwell's plain, public prose, you never detect a murmur of vanity even when his own experiences are his subject. Prophets want to change the way you think and act; and I am sure that politically we now think and act as we do in some small but actual measure because of what Orwell wrote.

On the whole the literary history of the 'thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics.

(“Inside the Whale”)

Even as a secular prophet, though he was the best of our age, he failed at last. His profound and enduring message, adumbrated in earlier essays, is finally summed up and given its strongest images in *1984*, which was intended to reveal to us not only the direction of our political drift but also, prophetically, our inmost nature. Politically, he says, men are interested in power, and the ideals they profess only whitewash this true motive. The aim of the modern totalitarian state is to “reduce consciousness,” to obliterate personality and the exercise of the spirit. Now these are the sorts of strictures we need and want prophets to make; in them we can recognize aspects of reality; they are true. However, Orwell, like many another provincial from the Enlightenment, was so shocked at discovering that we are not innately perfectible and good that he decided we are more corruptible than we actually are. He goes on: because of technological progress, greater social organization, more effective methods of propaganda (in sum, because of scientific advances and analytical ways of thinking), rulers are now free to exert their power more and more undisguisedly and will finally be able consciously to exert power just for its own sake. But with this distortion he loses us; it belongs to an artificiality like that of a horror-movie. (*1984* has been turned into a very bad horror-movie.) This, of all the insights he claims the most profound, is untrue, and its untruth darkens his other insights for us. I believe that men who get and monstrously abuse great power do it in the name of dialectical materialism, for greater Germany, the Mikado, the poor, God and country, to save the world for. . . . In any case, what they think they are doing it for is inextricably involved with their doing it. Those who are

conscious of their impulse to power and try to exert power only for their own satisfaction are merely cruel; and cruelty is not so potent a force as love of a cause however bad, for cruelty has limits and is satiable but perverted love never has enough. The tormentor's speech, in *1984*, setting forth the rationale of the rulers of that society, is a distorting mirror which is intended to show us the very core of ourselves; because Orwell has previously told us so much about ourselves and our time which we have recognized as true, we approach this revelation with excitement; but the excitement is transformed into a simply nervous excitement, such as one gets from a mad-scientist movie. What do we learn from the tormentor's speech? That George Orwell thought cruelty, when divorced from love, can become the strongest human impulse. In so particular a distortion it is not so much ourselves we see as a curious pathology. Swift is like a man with cancer who says men are wholly disgusting vessels of disease, and because sometimes we feel so we say yes, we are; but Orwell is like a man with cancer who says everyone else has cancer too, and we say no, only some men have cancer, most are not so sick as that, as for me I have asthma and a slipped disc.

*It is forbidden to dream again;
We maim our joys or hide them;
Horses are made of chromium steel
And little fat men shall ride them.*

(from a poem included in "Why I Write")

Why his failure as a prophet? For one thing, a great or even a successful prophet must be a forceful artist, preferably a good poet, and Orwell was a slight artist. His poetry is rhyming notions; even his judgments on poetry are of value only when he is treating it as a social symptom; he is far more sensitive to bad prose than to good poetry. His novels have the merit of containing descriptions which might have been incorporated in essays or books of reportage, but as novels they are not very good. His one allegory is accomplished and entertaining, but it does not penetrate far beyond the local politics that occasioned it; still, its satire, while slight, is pure and intense; I would guess that if any fiction of his is much read a century from now it will be *Animal Farm*. Orwell was a master of the miniature art of the conscious essay, along with Edmund Wilson, Julian Huxley, Aldous Huxley, V. S. Pritchett, T. S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, Virginia Woolf. . . ; such writers are sophisticated and intelligent and say something worth saying, and they know how to distribute their information and ideas in such a way as to produce pleasing surprises and a cumulative sense of understanding; but they are not prophetic; imagine Isaiah chopping his vision up and parceling it into essays. Of the humble art of reporting, too, Orwell is a master, one with few peers; but imagine Thucydides on the one side or Augustine on the other handcuffed to their own exterior experiences and to a faithful rendering of the reports of others. Orwell is a slight artist because he succeeded only in the lesser arts of essay-writing and reporting.

I think I should only feel what one invariably feels in revisiting any scene of childhood: How small everything has grown, and how terrible is the deterioration in myself!

(“Such, Such Were the Joys. . .”)

Psychologically, the root of his failure was, no doubt, his extreme sensitivity to cruelty and to the unjust exercise of authority. This native quality was aggravated into a malady by his experiences in his first public school (not so bad, according to Hollis, who was there, as Orwell makes out), in Eton, and in the British army in Burma. A man who was, and who thinks he was, much abused as a child is likely to identify himself unconsciously with all sufferers and to be disposed to hate violently all authorities. The emotional logic of such a man seems to run: suffering is the worst thing in the world; the people most loving and worthy of love have suffered greatly; therefore (!) let us rid the world of suffering so that people may love one another. “Privation and brute labor have to be abolished before the real problems of humanity can be tackled” (“Looking Back on the Spanish War”). Socialism provides an excellent program for a man with such logic: let us revolt against authority for the sake of the sufferers (i.e., against capitalists for the sake of the proletariat) and create a world (i.e., a socialist state) where there will be neither exploiters nor exploited. In explaining this about Orwell, I have accounted for only a little; for one thing, he himself was conscious that civilization demands rulers and that the suffering that results from being exploited was as likely to obliterate men as to fill them with love (see his “Marra-kech”); more important, though his sensitivity to cruelty and suffering was part of what drove him to write and to become a socialist, it does not begin to explain his limitations. And his limitations, I think, distorted his views more than his illness did; it was because of his limitations that he could suppose, as Swift did not, that all men suffered from his own malady.

Like everyone who was in Barcelona at the time, I saw only what was happening in my immediate neighborhood, but I saw and heard quite enough to be able to contradict many of the lies that have been circulated. . . . It is a horrible thing to have to enter into the details of inter-party polemics; it is like diving into a cesspool. But it is necessary to try and establish the truth, so far as it is possible.

(*Homage to Catalonia*, Chapter X)

His greatest limitation was his rationalistic view of things, his materialism. Some of his minor limitations, of course, were strengths. His Britishness, for example, was total, but he knew it and some of his best insights derive from this very knowledge; he was stuck with the facts of his experience, but from his experience he wrote what must be the best book likely to be written on the Spanish Civil War; he looked mostly for the social function of works of literature, but he served as a sort of corrective to the esoterics who have been overrunning literary criticism. But other of his minor limitations enfeebled him. One of the most startling was his

fitful historical imagination; though he understood such important recent changes in the West as the loss of popular belief in immortality, yet he displayed an abysmal ignorance of the Middle Ages, about which he often repeated the eighteenth-century clichés. He believed politics and social problems are, at least nowadays, more important than all the rest of life together and pollute all of it, a belief that is possible only to one who denies, among other things, the validity of religious experience. He had a weakness for generalizing; he sometimes wrote as though all civilized men were London-dwelling materialists with an atavistic love of flowers. He took a rather quantitative view of excellence, when he happened not to be thinking of a given man or act; so that he could suggest that poetry, just because its true audience is limited to the speakers of one language, is inferior to prose, which can be translated for all men. But most damaging, he put his trust in conscious reason as the measure of all things, and he wanted to look only at that which can be seen by the plain light of day. Bertrand Russell did as much but with less damage to himself, for the logic which Russell was good at had, like a natural science, nothing to do with politics and ethics; but these were the core of Orwell's concern. Thus limited, he was hostile to, denied, or was indifferently skeptical about matters of the greatest importance, God, the unconscious, sin and evil; he was inadequate to deal with poetry, love, religious emotions and rituals; and he could not imagine that human suffering might be more than a matter of endurance, sado-masochism, and willed destruction. In sum, this prophet of our time failed because of the materialist rationalism which has been the binding spirit and philosophy of the age of science and which has at no time or place been stronger than during Orwell's generation in England; as a prophet he knew it was partial and often false, but as a creature of the age he could not break its bonds. Had he broken free, he would not have spoken for so many nor would so many have listened; had he broken free, he might have been as excellent a prophet as he was honest a writer and man.

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HARVEY SWADOS

The Long and the Short of It¹

IF IT IS hard to write good short stories (which it certainly is) I sometimes suspect that it is almost as hard to write about them. The short story writer tends to peer angrily over your shoulder as you type your cold criticism: "collections of short stories are usually reviewed in tandem or four-in-hand," say the authors of one such recent collection, "and in an atmosphere of combativeness (X is more sensitive than Y) that overlooks the fact, known to most writers, that to make sense out of life is an exertion of uncommon cooperativeness." Beyond the question of cooperativeness there is a knottier problem: short stories are not confections to be swallowed one after the other, seriatim—as they must be by deadline-bound reviewers.

Pleading guilty to exactly that crime, I quickly divert your attention to the publishers, whose crimes it is true are more those of omission than of commission. If it seems inappropriate to indict for nonfeasance just before plunging into an omnibus review, I would point out that every book here with the exception of the first is the work of an established writer; it takes a lot of looking to find a publisher who has recently had guts enough to bring out the story production of a little-known or new writer.

Therefore let us salute Macmillan, which has done the unusual (and if we are to believe the pathetic cries of the publishers, the courageous) by publishing the collected stories of Betsy Hopkins Lochridge, none of whose stories have ever been published anyplace before, and who has never even published a novel. Well, Macmillan may have lost a little money on their modest investment in Mrs. Lochridge, but they have won at least one reader's respect. Betsy Lochridge is not, at least not yet, in the same league as the other writers with whom she is grouped here, but she is a new writer of talent, which is surely more noteworthy than the news that Erskine Caldwell and William Saroyan have in recent months once more brought out the mixture as before.

Blue River is the name of an imaginary Southern town, peopled by Mrs. Lochridge with some fourteen individual types, to each of whom she allots one story. Frustrated intellectuals, embittered Negroes, spinsters leading secret lives, soured men with hidden pasts—in short, the folk of Winesburg, Ohio are here transported to the South. It is unfortunate that

¹BLUE RIVER, by *Betsy Hopkins Lochridge*. Macmillan, \$2.75. SEIZE THE DAY, by *Saul Bellow*. Viking. \$3.00. BEASTS AND MEN, by *Pierre Gascar*. Atlantic-Little Brown. \$3.50. THE STORIES OF LIAM O'FLAHERTY. Devin-Adair. \$5.00. A CONTEST OF LADIES, by *William Sansom*. Reynal. \$3.50. THE DAFFODIL SKY, by *H. E. Bates*. Atlantic-Little Brown. \$3.50. THE SAILOR, SENSE OF HUMOUR, AND OTHER STORIES, by *V. S. Pritchett*. Knopf. \$4.50.

the Negroes talk darky talk, for they are not merely Uncle Tom or Uncle Remus, and it is even more unfortunate that the author follows Sherwood Anderson so slavishly that we move from grotesque to grotesque, as in a waxworks. Nevertheless here is one Southern girl who has not chosen the path of so many of her sister-writers; she has imagination and verbal facility and the nerve to think herself into a panoramic variety of people and to sweep through their lives with a sad and loving eye. We shall hear more from her.

Whatever we say of Saul Bellow, we cannot say that he or his people do not rise to the challenge of life. His new book is in no way merely an interim collection of stories between *Augie March* and his next novel. What we have in *Seize The Day* instead is a title work that is a long story, or a short novel, followed by three briefer stories and a one-act play. "Seize the Day" is itself absolutely masterful, at once funny and profoundly moving, a virtuoso performance almost as exciting in execution as in what it conveys. The rest of the book is so much slighter, not just in length but in effect, that it does more than detract from the splendor of the title story, it raises the question of whether the publishers lacked courage to issue a "small" book (and this by a novelist who is both a best-seller and one of our best living writers).

In any case, there has already been considerable comment by reviewers to the effect that the unifying theme of all the separate pieces in this book is money—which may be true enough, but is also true of other good writers reacting to life in a commercial culture. I am struck rather by the continuous reappearance of a thread of human fancy in Mr. Bellow's work that to my knowledge has thus far gone unremarked. I refer to the crackpot-invention idea, which he uses not just as an indication of screwiness but as a common denominator of the old human urge to break the mold, an urge which is wacky and comic but also helps to differentiate us from the other members of the animal kingdom.

It will be remembered that the ship's carpenter with whom Augie March is cast adrift after they have been torpedoed is a logical nut obsessed with the idea of the ideal colony he is going to set up when they are flung ashore in a remote place. In "Seize the Day" the glorious swindler Dr. Tamkin also has more to him than can be measured by his gambling other people's money in futures and his fake psychologizing.

"An electrical device for truck drivers to wear in their caps," said Dr. Adler, describing one of Tamkin's proposed inventions. "To wake them with a shock when they begin to be drowsy at the wheel. It's triggered by the change in blood-pressure when they start to doze." . . . Mr. Perls said, "To me he described an underwater suit so a man could walk on the bed of the Hudson in case of an atomic attack. He said he could walk to Albany in it."

To which the hero of the story replies defensively: "... I get funny ideas myself. Everybody wants to make something. Any American does."

In the next story, "A Father-to-be," the hero is daydreaming in the subway: "...as a chemist, he asked himself what kind of compound this new Danish drug might be, and started thinking about various inventions of his own, synthetic albumen, a cigarette that lit itself, a cheaper motor fuel."

Nor is that all. The hero of "Looking for Mr. Green" "sat and listened while the old man unfolded his scheme. This was to create one Negro millionaire a month by subscription. One clever, good-hearted young fellow elected every month would sign a contract to use the money to start a business employing Negroes. This would be advertised by chain letters and word of mouth, and every Negro wage-earner would contribute a dollar a month. Within five years there would be sixty millionaires. 'That'll fetch respect,' he said. . . ."

Even in the final story, "The Gonzaga Manuscripts," the little Spanish banker who supposedly holds a great poet's last papers is more interested in the title to a pitchblende mine in Morocco than in the poems: "...Pitchblende has uranium in it. Uranium is used in atom bombs."

I do not mean to drive this too far, only to indicate one means by which Mr. Bellow brings his characters to life: every person in "Seize the Day" is instinct with life, insistent, and as aggressively real as in-laws or pushing strangers on a subway. It might almost be said that the daydreamed scheme, the cockeyed moneymaking device, replaces the nocturnal dream as a technique of rounding and deepening his people; and then it would have to be noted that oddly enough both Augie March and Tommy Wilhelm (the hero of "Seize the Day") are less "real" than any of the brilliantly-drawn people who surround them. Having uttered this complaint, I must move toward retracting it by adding that the already famous closing paragraphs of "Seize the Day," in which the lost Tommy finds himself by weeping at the bier of a dead stranger are more than convincing, they are exquisitely right.

In "The Season of the Dead," the harrowing long story which concludes Pierre Gascar's *Beasts and Men* (this book is built like Saul Bellow's, only in reverse: here it is the novella which follows a group of six short stories), M. Gascar reaches precisely the *opposite* conclusion to Mr Bellow: "...nothing makes you feel so impoverished as the death of strangers; dying, they testify to death without yielding anything of their lives that might compensate for the enhanced importance of darkness."

If fiction were logic, either M. Gascar or Mr. Bellow would have to be right. Fortunately it is not. Isn't one of the reasons that we read and love fiction the fact that in it both good and evil, light and darkness are celebrated with equal passion, sometimes not in the work of two different writers but in the work of *one* writer?

Pierre Gascar has tremendous force and delicacy of vision joined together. He writes of everything that is gross and hideous with such precision, loveliness and tenderness (in a perfectly superb translation by Jean Stewart) that we must recognize him as a writer of surpassing

power. The first two stories of this collection, "The Horses" (a hallucinatory tale in the manner of Curzio Malaparte of a sea of horses drowning in military defeat) and "The House of Blood" (a more "realistic" story of a little apprentice-butcher boy who finally revolts against the sadism of his employer) are each in their own way magnificently flawless. Thereafter to my mind the book sags, as the stories proceed to reveal to us more about humankind through its dangerous relations with cats, dogs and rats and their death—until we come to the long final story, which deals solely with the death of human beings. It describes—if one can use so banal a word for an experience which leaves the reader dry-eyed but trembling—a group of French prisoners of war busying themselves in the Ukraine with tending their little cemetery, helping a hiding Jew to survive for a time by sleeping in their freshly-dug graves, and watching the sealed boxcars loaded with weeping Jews clattering across the Russian plains to the gas chambers.

Pierre Gascar writes of death, he is obsessed with death, but he celebrates life. In the first story, the terrified horses are trapped, but they are released by Peer, their keeper; in the second story, the butcher struggles against yielding his slaughtering rights to the new municipal abattoir, but the little apprentice, sobbing and praying, does run away from "the voices of all the lambs we had killed"; in the final story the narrator, nauseated by what he sees, does clutch the Polish girl Maria in his arms for one brief instant. Everyone who cares not just about modern writing but about the quality of modern life must read this book.

Liam O'Flaherty writes of beasts and men, of birth and death, too—I was surprised to find out how much, and I suppose I would not be alone in this. Fully nine of the forty-two stories in his big collected volume deal solely with animals; there is no human intrusion other than the omniscient eye and the attribution of human feelings to the beasts of field, sea and air. The best of these, "The Cow's Death," is to my mind a masterpiece. Its tenderness toward the beast that gives birth to a dead calf and finally follows it over the rocks to the sea where it has been flung is very akin to that of Gascar; but I must confess that I read on through these tales of mother love, sex, birth and death in the animal kingdom with increasing impatience and that one, "The Tide," filled me with active distaste. In this story Mr. O'Flaherty describes an empty beach, "immaculate," "clear," "sparkling," "radiantly beautiful," "majestic," and so forth, which is defiled by tourists, bathers and picnickers, and which at the end is struggling once again to cleanse itself of the impurities deposited by the human race.

Fortunately this contempt for the human race and its offal, this preference for a pure, uninhabited planet, is only one facet of Mr. O'Flaherty's literary personality. For the most part he writes with gusto and compassion of the little triumphs and tragedies of Irish peasant people. Rural, primitive, superstitious, poverty-stricken and unlettered, they are here sculpted by a man who, while he is one of them, is after all also an ex-

tremely sophisticated and widely-traveled artist. It is remarkable with what singleness of purpose he has for all these years pursued the task of seeing these people through their own eyes—stern yet just, passionately Biblical, voluptuously affirmative. In only one instance does he step outside, and there with such surefooted success that one wishes he had done it more often. I refer to the perfectly delightful “The Post Office,” in which the hamlet of Praiseach on the Connemara coast is invaded by a Cadillac bearing three French-speaking, gaudily garbed cosmopolitans, who desire to telegraph some lines of Lorca to a dancer friend in Los Angeles. Without once condescending to the locals or their odd guests, a feat in itself, he sets up a highly entertaining confrontation.

Before coming to the end of my allotted space, I should like to express one American’s reaction to the story collections of English writers that have come his way. The volumes of William Sansom and H.E. Bates are strikingly similar physically: each has the same price, the same number of pages, the same number of stories (fifteen). What is more, both men are “pros”, knowledgeable, prolific writers unashamedly writing for fairly definite audiences which await their regular production. And each might be said to have a foot in both the highbrow and the popular fiction worlds, for the jackets of both books are studded with praise from Horace Gregory, Eudora Welty, Harvey Breit, V. S. Pritchett, James Stern, May Sarton and other important names.

The reason for the praise of Mr. Sansom is perfectly simple. He uses the English language as though he had invented it, taken out a patent on it, and thoroughly enjoyed manipulating it. It is enough to fill any American (well, almost any) with envy, and it is almost enough to make me add my small voice to the larger chorus. Almost, but not quite. For what Mr. Sansom does with his beautifully polished tool is to construct the kind of literary bric à brac that decorators nowadays call “conversation pieces”, or what we used to describe as O. Henry stories—thin tales dependent for their interest on snappers, punch-lines, surprise endings, just as they depend for their conversational, or after-dinner value, on the fishy radiance of Sansom’s language. For me, however, he is at bottom a thoroughly uninteresting writer, because he is without heart and without interest in people except insofar as they can be used to illustrate rather small ideas or schemes which he finds amusing.

In four of the stories in his new collection H. E. Bates makes use of a theme which is naturally a favorite of many literary islanders, from Maugham to Sansom: the confrontation of the complete Englishman with the completely exotic milieu, ambiance, or human being. But in the case of Mr. Bates, even when he descends to a level hardly if at all above that of superior ladies’-magazine fiction, he is concerned at bottom with the lives of the people about whom he writes in a way that William Sansom almost never is. The result is that, while some of these stories are slight and some are inferior, the reader is never uncomfortably aware of being used or tricked; and when they are good—as are the title story, “The

Maker of Coffins" and "The Common Denominator"—they are very affecting indeed. It should be noted, too, that while Mr. Bates's language does not coruscate as does Mr. Sansom's, it is not for that reason any the less effective or evocative; quite the contrary.

The case of V. S. Pritchett is somewhat different. Heralded or not by encomia, his collected stories filled me with the same awe that always overcomes me when I pick up the Europeans on Alfred A. Knopf's list, from Thomas Mann to some obscure Finn writing epics of love among the Lapps. Somehow one visualizes them as invariably distinguished and eminent, teetering graciously on the very verge of (at least) a Nobel Prize. But of course this is all wrong for Mr. Pritchett. No one could be more unassuming in his literary stance. Here is no overarching structure designed to mirror the complexity of life. Here is no consciously ambitious attempt to show men and women in flux.

What we have instead is a series of low-keyed views of English people as they are, sometimes boldly looked at (like the businessman and wife on vacation in Europe in "Handsome Is As Handsome Does"), sometimes almost offhandedly glanced at (like the lonely tea-shop keeper and her vigorous cyclist guests in "Many Are Disappointed"). Sometimes both the people and this laconic reportage are, I must confess, puzzling, and there are moments when his lower middle-class Englishmen seem more exotic to me than O'Flaherty's Irish peasants or Gascar's French soldiers. This is partly because Mr. Pritchett does not comport himself at all like a Great Writer, and almost never tries to be merely impressive.

It takes a while, like acquiring a taste for those weekly puzzle contests so dear to the readers of the *New Statesman* or the *Spectator*, but then Mr. Pritchett begins to creep up on you. Only temporarily do his simplicity and plainness mask a supple and effective prose: "Hearing his wife use the typewriter or telephone in the office, drinking a cup of tea, listening to his two girls, torpidly watching them, his slow mind lay down like a dog in the domestic basket." And after a time it is borne in upon you that some of these seemingly artless (and even pointless!) pieces are among the funniest stories of our time—funny in a caricaturing, Dickensian fashion (the two drunken biddies in "Things As They Are"), in a sly, ribald fashion (the milkman, his horse, and his lady friend in "Eleven O'Clock"), in a fantastic, fairy-tale fashion (the nouveau-riche couple and their highly unusual neighbor in "The Landlord"). I like Pritchett best in this comic vein, but will not quarrel with those who find he can do other things too.

The long and the short of it is that the short fiction of the season has been not just varied, not just international, but good on many levels, despite the fashionable doom-cries of those who currently hate fiction. Reason for thanks.